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Free Minds and Free Markets

In Praise of Vulgarity
How commercial culture liberates Islam—and the West

The Politics of Dead Children
Have sanctions against Iraq murdered millions?

Social Insecurity
Why countries are turning to market-based pension plans

Hollywood's Second Sex
Women and the movies

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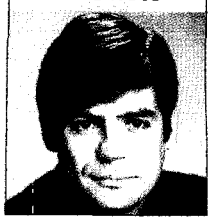
Editor's Note



WHEN I WAS in high school, Izod Lacoste tennis shirts were all the rage, among both boys and girls. At any party, game, or school gathering, you'd be swimming in a sea of glandularly challenged teens in yellow, red, blue, pink, and green shirts, most sporting the signature "alligator" on the left breast. The alligator, of course, is actually a crocodile. That was the nickname of René Lacoste, the French tennis great of the 1920s who not only designed the original shirt but is credited with, as one commentator put it, "starting the flood of apparel logos" that has never receded. Not surprisingly, such nuances were lost on me and my high school classmates. For us, the alligator shirt was about neither history nor tennis; it was about the here and now. It functioned as a marker of class (it was significantly more expensive than various knockoffs, such as J.C. Penney's sad-sack, wannabe "fox" shirt) and cool (it was a virtually effortless way of showing a sense of style).

Partly because I was something of a tediously studied nonconformist and partly because my own wardrobe boasted more foxes than alligators, I started cutting out the animal insignias on my shirts and stitching the cloth back together with black thread—a process that left a conspicuous, jagged scar rather than an all-important logo. Responses ran from back-slappingly positive (anti-status gestures find a ready, if small, audience among adolescents) to physically abusive (there's no way to count the number of twistings my left nipple took at the hands of outraged style kings).

I was less interested in the nature of the responses than in my ability to carve out a particular identity for myself using ready-made, off-the-shelf materials. The point, however inchoate, inarticulate, and immature, was to register dissent with the status quo and to assert some measure of individuality in a stultifying, conformist atmosphere.

Mine is an admittedly trivial example, drawn from the minimum-security, open-air prison of suburban New Jersey. Several of this month's articles deal with the ways in which people in truly tough circumstances appropriate commercial culture to their own liberatory ends. **reason** Senior Editor Charles Paul Freund's cover story, "In Praise of Vulgarity" (page 24), is a grand tour of Stalin's Russia, which spawned the *stilyagi*, zoot-suit-wearing, jazz-loving malcontents; fundamentalist Algeria, which energized the lewd and subversive rai music scene; and contemporary Cambodia, which boasts an outlawed karaoke circuit the government is trying to crush with tanks.

Freund's piece opens with the recent fall of Kabul, which Afghans celebrated by binging on the schlock culture long denied them by the Taliban. He describes how, even under the threat of prison and worse, Afghan men insisted on getting their hair cut in illegal styles (including, improbably, a coif based on Leonardo DiCaprio's in *Titanic*). In "Free Hand" (page 82), Virginia Postrel notes that many burqa-clad women did something similar with nail polish. In "Porous Border" (page 65), **reason** Assistant Editor Sara Rimensnyder explores the ways in which Mexican migrants from the small village of Cherán have mixed elements of native and U.S. culture, creating a hybrid form that is constantly evolving, depending on what its creators want or need.

Such unauthorized activity unnerves many people, especially those who seek control and regimentation, whether political or cultural. It also reminds those of us in democratic, largely tolerant societies that the personal expression we can usually buy on the cheap often costs others a very dear price.

—Nick Gillespie

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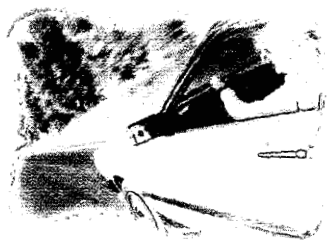

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Cathy Young

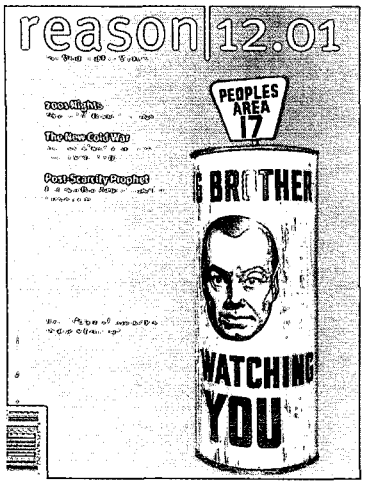
Matt Welch

Glenn Garvin

In "Windbags of War" (page 19), Contributing Editor CATHY YOUNG focuses on campus outrage about U.S. military action after September 11. Young is intimately familiar with the ire of politically correct students and faculty members from her experiences as a Rutgers undergraduate in the 1980s. As a regular at the *Daily Targum*, she was voted "the columnist you'd most like to see taken out and shot." Young was more thrilled than intimidated. "I saw it as a badge of honor," she recalls. Young, who writes regularly for *The Boston Globe* and other publications, is the author of *Ceasefire!: Why Women and Men Must Join Forces to Achieve True Equality* (1999) and *Growing Up in Moscow*, a 1989 memoir of her childhood in the Soviet Union.

In "The Politics of Dead Children" (page 52), MATT WELCH cuts through partisan fog to tackle the tough question of how many people are starving or dead due to U.N. sanctions against Iraq. The answer is grim—and as unsettling as Welch's discovery that "the anti-sanctions camp has approached the issue with a complete hostility to facts." Based in Los Angeles, Welch has written for the *Online Journalism Review*, *Wired*, and the lefty Web site *WorkingForChange.com*, where he was hard-pressed recently to convince some readers that "on balance, we're not the evil empire."

Longtime Contributing Editor GLENN GARVIN reflects on the appeal of his childhood hero Barry Goldwater in "He Was Right" (page 60), a review of a recent biography of the failed 1964 presidential candidate. Garvin spent 18 years covering Latin American politics for *The Washington Times* and *The Miami Herald*. Along the way, he wrote *Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA and the Contras* (1992) and co-authored, with Ana Rodriguez, *Diary of a Survivor: Nineteen Years in a Cuban Women's Prison* (1995). In January, Garvin took a new path professionally, leaving the *Herald's* foreign desk to become the paper's TV critic. "I concluded Latin America was not going to get fixed in my lifetime," he says.



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Incompatible Islam?

Charles Paul Freund's "2001 Nights" (December) applies a tolerant attitude to a religion and culture that few Americans are well acquainted with. I would point out a few facts that might give Freund additional perspective. He writes of the distinguished and elegant intellect of Edward Said. Just to balance the picture of urbane sophistication, he should know that on a recent visit to the Lebanese side of the Israel-Lebanon border, Said participated in that most traditional of Arab practices, throwing stones at the Jews.

For all that Sufi mystics appear to be appealing, note that they are the intellectual heirs of the Hashishin of Crusader times, who assassinated (which is the source of the word in English) both Crusaders and those Muslim leaders who accommodated them. Freund really ought to check his history. Islam did not proselytize, it conquered. Only "people of the book" (Jews and Christians) were not forced to convert or die, but if they did not convert they were subjected to extensive disabilities and added taxes. See *The Dhimmi,* by Bat Ye'or (Associated University Press).

Bear in mind that Islam spread by the sword. We in the West are in Dar al Harb, the World of Conflict, which is all of the world not part of Dar al Islam, where Islamic law governs. Promoting theocracy to a degree the medieval Church could only dream of, Islam is in many ways incompatible with Western secularism. Its teachings foster not amity but domination.

However, it is possible that American Muslims (especially native-born ones, who know only American freedoms) can formulate an Islam that is what they say it is, as Muhammad Ali said in his recent interview in *Reader's Digest.* This is not a call for an inquisition, but rather a call for knowledge. What we know can only help us, while what we do not know can leave us undefended.

David Peters
Los Angeles, CA

Charles Paul Freund replies: Although you wouldn't know it from this letter, I argued that the early, "official," feel-good dialogue about Islam was empty and problematic. But is David Peters' alternative any better? He links Sufism to the Assassins. Islam's mysticism was a rich, established tradition centuries before Assassins founder Hassan al-Sabbah was born. The Assassins were Isma'ilis; their "heirs" are modern Isma'ilis. Isma'ilis of South Asia and the West are among the most liberal and enlightened Muslims in the world. They are evidence of Islam's modernist potential. So is Sunni Turkey, which despite its problems has maintained a secular democracy for 80 years. So are Algeria's besieged secularists. Islam is neither the incarnation of "peace" that the White House claims nor the bogeyman Peters portrays. His charge of "incompatibility," by the way, used to be hurled at Catholics.

My assertion about the relative tolerance of Islam is not controversial. Even as restricted dhimmis, the Jews of Islam for centuries led less restricted and more dignified lives than did Europe's Jews. Until modern times, Islam's Jews were far less likely to be massacred, forcibly ghettoized, Satanized, or subjected to inquisition. Islam wouldn't tolerate such "pagans" as Zoroastrians, but neither would Christendom. Zoroastrians who survived and prospered

did so among Hindus.

Islam spread in many ways, including conquest and trade. But even after conquest, Islamization was often very gradual. Between Egypt's conquest and the rise of a Muslim majority there, for example, seven centuries passed.

Liberty sans Paradox

Cathy Young's "Liberty's Paradoxes" (December) reads like a reluctant statist's apology for a necessary evil. She marginalizes those who quote Benjamin Franklin as knee-jerk libertarians, too dogmatic to see the value of compromise and consensus in this time of "war."

Law enforcement didn't lack for tools to prevent September's attacks. Institutional stasis and interdepartmental rivalry, inevitable in a massive bureaucracy, were our government's Achilles heel. It was a colossal and predictable failure, given the $300 billion spent each year on defense.

President Clinton declared a war on terrorism some time ago, another government effort like the wars on drugs and poverty. Young suggests government can win such wars, ignoring as usual the unblemished record of failure. Time and again we see that expanding law enforcement's power simply corrupts.

Young also derides the notion that giving less offense would reduce our enemies' ire. Like a gambler doubling on a losing bet, she insinuates that a less intrusive foreign policy now would be a sign of weakness. By implication she equates the bombing of civilian targets by U.S. planes with the international terror of McDonald's and Hollywood. As incitements of extremist hatred, these would appear leagues apart.

Young interprets the greatest recent failure of our government to fulfill its first responsibility, national defense, as cause to yield even more liberty and power to our monopolist protectors. A magazine called **reason** is hardly the place I'd expect to see such a viewpoint, unless the parody is intended.

David C. Calderwood
Loves Park, IL

Don't be so quick to sell out our freedoms. Did increased security measures (read: less freedom) stop the Irish Republican Army from bombing in England? Did increased security measures stop the bombings in Lebanon? Did increased security measures stop the embassy bombings? Did increased security measures stop the attacks on September 11th (or did they actually facilitate the terrorists' evil deeds)?

Why do so many people buy into the increased security scenario, when it has never stopped determined terrorists and probably never will? Anything that intelligent people in the government put into place can be thwarted by determined, equally intelligent radical nuts.

The government has jumped to suspend our freedoms with every attack in recent history: the Kennedy assassination, Oklahoma City, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and now the September 11 events. The fact is that the Constitution was intended to protect us from the government, and we cannot expect the government to enforce it willingly.

David E. Hoffmann
Prescott, AZ

I was pleasantly surprised to read, in the most recent issue, several perspectives on the potential threats to liberty from the ongoing efforts to curb terrorism. There are two points that I believe ought to be made more clearly, however.

First, to those like Cathy Young who advocate more government intelligence gathering and are willing to part with a great deal of their freedom for a sense of safety, recall that this is the same government that fills the "pig book" with $43 billion of pork barrel spending annually. This is the same government that can't run a school for children and spends more than 50 cents of every dollar it takes in to administer the ever-decreasing remainder, which it then passes on to other incompetents. Let's not place too much stock in the capacity of such an institution to manage this feat.

Second, to those who shudder at every possible tool being placed in the hands of our government to guard against terrorism, the proof will be in the results. What is done with the

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information and how it is used (to successfully head off and prosecute criminals or to punish simple malcontents, activists, and free speech advocates) will be the litmus test.

It is probably time for a wait-and-see approach—reserving legal challenge to the new laws until someone is legitimately aggrieved by their application. I, for one, am not concerned about some underpaid, overworked, shoddy bureaucrat in an office across the continent having a file somewhere among 250 million others that says what Web sites I visited last month, assuming that the capacity to do so will provide some modicum of protection to my family and the American way of life.

Joseph L. Stark
Valencia, CA

Cathy Young replies: To those who believe that I am advocating "statism," I would like to point out that in "Liberty's Paradoxes" I was discussing one of the few essential functions of the state. It is one that even the staunchest proponents of limited government recognize: to "insure domestic tranquility" and "provide for the common defense," in the words of the U.S. Constitution.

The scope of the powers the government should be allowed for this purpose is, of course, subject to debate. Personally, I don't believe that judicially authorized surveillance of a suspect's electronic communications equals the loss of a great amount of liberty.

The government may have a mixed track record in combating terrorism (though it is worth noting that we rarely think of the plots that were thwarted, such as the potentially devastating plan to blow up New York City's Holland and Lincoln tunnels several years ago). However, there seems to be no realistic alternative.

Rebels on the Air

As a person who works for a large radio corporation (CBS/Infinity), I found Jesse Walker's article ("Free Your Radio," December) rather shortsighted and ignorant of recent history. Walker wrote, "Most radio stations today are boring and homogeneous, chains of clones controlled by an ever-dwindling handful of focus-group-driven corporations." This trend can be directly traced back to the deregulation of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Before 1996, there were plenty of focus-group-driven corporations, but the Telecom Act freed them to spread chains of clones at an unprecedented level.

The niche marketing he deplores is a result of corporations' owning six or eight full-strength signals in one market. To avoid competing with themselves, they must resort to niche marketing. Small, independent broadcasters cannot possibly compete with media behemoths controlling 40 percent or more of the market share in any given city. In fact, it could be argued that deregulation and the subsequent buying sprees by big corporations drove the price of radio stations far beyond the reach of "mom and pop" broadcasters. Further deregulation will only lead to monopolization. One need only look to the Clear Channel Communications Web site to assess their ultimate goal. They already have their slogan in place: "Clear Channel IS radio."

Cactus Jack
Production Director, KMLE-FM
Phoenix, AZ

Jesse Walker replies: It's misleading to focus exclusively on the Telecommunications Act. To the extent that it deregulated radio's ownership rules, the act was simply continuing a series of changes that began in the early '90s and continue today. The trouble is, the same Federal Communications Commission that loosened those rules has done almost nothing to eliminate the entry barriers that prevent smaller stations from competing with the chains. The government could expand the broadcast spectrum (by, say, allowing new FM stations to transmit over unused UHF frequencies); it could reduce the costly regulatory requirements faced by start-up stations; it could legalize low-power broadcasting on more than a piddling scale. Instead, it only deregulates to the extent that it helps the established industry, leaving other rules in place or even tightening them. Obviously, this is not the kind of "deregulation" that I'm interested in.

Attention College Students

reason is accepting applications for the 2002 Burton C. Gray Memorial Internship. The intern works 10 weeks during the summer in our Los Angeles office and receives housing, a stipend of $2,000, and up to $400 in travel expenses. The job includes reporting and writing for **reason**, helping with research, proofreading, and other tasks. Previous interns have gone on to work at *The Wall Street Journal, Forbes,* and ABC News.

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Bypassing state censors; a courtroom coup; the men who japed; aquaterror; calculating the cost of war; and drug war heretic

Bypassing the censors

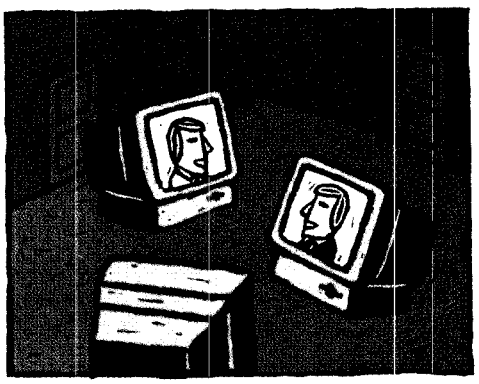
Triangle Boy Howdy

Sara Rimensnyder

IN A PAGE from the handbook on the liberating powers of globalization, thousands of Chinese and Middle Eastern Web surfers are leapfrogging past censors to view *The New York Times*, *Hustler*, and many other sites their governments have decided to "protect" them from.

The unfettered Web access comes thanks to an ingenious program called Triangle Boy. It's the brainchild of 35-year-old Stephen Hsu, the founder of an Emeryville, California, start-up called SafeWeb.

Although a thorough explanation involves a lot of high-tech jargon, the basic idea behind the program is simple: A Chinese surfer finds the Internet address of a computer that has Triangle Boy installed. He then uses that computer as a proxy server to jump to a forbidden site. Once there, Triangle Boy sends the information to a third computer, the server at SafeWeb. SafeWeb encrypts it, makes it look like it originated from the middleman computer, then sends it back to the user in China—hence, the triangle.



Hsu, who's on a year-long hiatus from his day job as a theoretical physicist at the University of Oregon, created the software specifically with the idea of circumventing state repression. He offers it for free. The company, meanwhile, has seed money from several venture capital firms (and the Central Intelligence Agency); it plans to offer other privacy services for a fee.

According to *Business. 2.0*, users were downloading 300,000 pages daily just months after the program's June release. Hsu has posted testimonials from some of those users on his site. From one in Saudi Arabia: "Yes, with Triangle Boy I'm able to access ALL my favorite sites again. You just wouldn't believe it if I told you that our people have even been blocked from educational sites! And of course no one can ask why or say anything to anybody in this country!"

Americans are also finding uses for the program. An employee from Morgan Stanley Dean Witter wrote to say, "SafeWeb is the only way I've been able to access my personal email account, which has been blocked by my corporate employer....I'm making sure the word about Triangle Boy gets WIDELY spread around."

Beltway Econ 101

Dollar Follies

Sam MacDonald

WHEN IS A dollar not a dollar? When it costs you $1.40, according to a new study released by the Joint Economic Committee (JEC). If you don't buy that num-

"Is it 'sick' to be 'Utopian'? The use of a term such as 'sick' in a post-Szaszian age is, to say the least, naive; so let us translate it in this fashion: Is it perverse, or wicked, or very silly to be 'utopian'?"

—Ralph Raico, "On Tory Blind Spots"

"B.F. Skinner affirms that society cannot survive without diversity. So, he says, the 'cultural designer' must plan for it. Alas, experience demonstrates that planners prefer uniformity."

—Richard Crum, "Sorting Out Skinner"

"It is a regrettable but undeniable fact that economics ...is liable to recurrent fashions and fads, the periodic re-intrusion into professional discussion of popular superstitions which earlier generations of economists had successfully driven back into the circles of cranks and demagogues."

—F.A. Hayek, "'Planning' Our Way to Serfdom"

"The belief in a society in which the remuneration of individuals is made to correspond to something called social justice is a chimera which is threatening to seduce modern democracy to accept a system that would involve a disastrous loss of personal freedom."

—F.A. Hayek, "'Planning' Our Way to Serfdom"

ber, try listening to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.). He says a dollar is really worth $2.15.

"Hidden Costs of Government Spending," a report released in December by JEC Chairman Jim Saxton (R-N.J.), offers a frightening throwback to freshman economics. It explores in full detail the concept of "deadweight loss," which measures the "hidden" cost of government spending by taking taxation's effect on prices into account. You can link to the lesson at www.house.gov/jec, or skip the gory details and read it here: Every extra dollar of government spending *costs* the economy $1.40. According to the study, that's because of expensive red tape and the efficiency lost in robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Saxton's report was only one shot in the long battle over how much to spend on stimulating the sluggish economy. Sen. Daschle and friends held a press conference to unveil their own figure. According to these big spenders, every extra dollar in federal spending directed at low-income and unemployed workers would actually boost the economy to the tune of $2.15. The gain comes courtesy of the magical "money multiplier," yet another bad memory for graduates of Econ 101.

So how much is a dollar really worth? That depends on which dead economist you believe. Here's hoping the folks on Capitol Hill come to a consensus pretty soon, however: Any stimulus plan that passes both the House and the Senate will likely be in the billions—a lot of cash, no matter how you do the math.

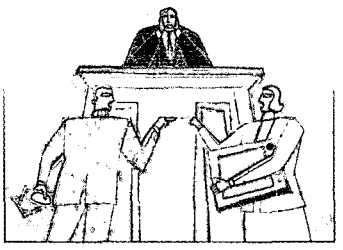
Courtroom coup

Bye-Bye, Jury

James Morrow

BRITAIN IS POISED to eliminate almost two-thirds of all jury trials, according to a report in the *New Statesman.* New rules would allow a wide range of offenses (including any crime with a maximum sentence of less than two years) to be tried solely by a judge employed by the crown. To make the situation scarier, much of this change is being implemented by bureaucratic stealth and with as little public comment as possible. As the *New Statesman*'s Nick Cohen put it, "In America, Australia or any other common-law democracy, it would need a coup d'etat to implement the government's programme."

Part of the reason Tony Blair's Labour government has been



able to get away with its scheme is the British public's outrage at a crime wave that has had shocked citizens gasping, as one did in a CBS News report last May, that "London is more dangerous these days than New York."

Software for pranksters

The Men Who Japed

Jesse Walker

THE YES MEN are a band of pranksters who specialize in sending up the World Trade Organization, sometimes with wit and sometimes by rote. They're in a good position to do this, since they happen to own the domain name gatt.org. Many Web surfers, searching for information about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, have instead stumbled on the parody site, with its sardonic satires of the trade group's worldview. The least careful readers have failed to recognize the site as a joke. At times, this has allowed the Yes Men to pose as representatives of the "real" WTO and, under that guise, to deliver lectures in the Modest Proposal mode. (One "Andreas Bichlbauer," for example, told a European conference that his group favored the abolition of the afternoon siesta.)

Under the law, the WTO can't do much about its leftist doppelganger. A year ago, it wrote to the World Intellectual Property Organization, suggesting it formulate "a recommendation concerning the bad faith and abusive use of names of intergovernmental organizations." More recently, it contacted the Yes Men's upstream provider, Verio, in November, requesting that it ask the Yes Men to eliminate the trade group's logo from their site. "The WTO considers that www.gatt.org should put whatever it wants on its website," explains spokesman Jean-Guy Carrier, "provided this does not include the WTO copyrighted logo." He adds that "public deception should not be confused with satire."

The Yes Men have responded with YesIWill, software intended to let fellow pranksters of all political persuasions create instant parodies of their least favorite Web sites. The instructions aren't terribly coherent to users not versed in code, but in essence the program allows you to make your own mirror site of your target, then replace selected words and graphics with words and graphics of your own. (One user, for example, revamped the CNN site to replace "bin Laden" with "Satan.") The software can be downloaded from www.theyesmen.org/ream.

Globalization debates

No Poor Traders

Brian Doherty

ACCORDING TO THE anti-globalization movement, the integration of the global economy is nothing more than a chance for the rich to fleece the poor. A recent working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that almost precisely the opposite is true: The best way to keep poor nations poor is to segregate them from the world economy.

Economists Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson examine data about world inequality, both within and between nations, from 1820 to the present. They chose 1820 as their »

Quotes

"Freedom is a con. It's a sales tactic to sell capitalism."

—British Islamist Mohammed Kureishi in the November 23 *Washington Post*

"The notion of 'lifestyle correctness,' founded largely on narcissistic health ideals, has come to shape the direction of people's lives in ways which once characterised the power of formal religions. In place of faith in the creeds and tenets of the established church, we now follow slavishly the equally false promises of the health promotion professions..."

—Peter Marsh, lecturing "In Praise of Bad Habits" at the Oxford, England, Social Issues Research Center in November

Sources

Anyone who complains about a paucity of perspective in U.S. media need only look online. For those who'd like to know how immigrants from Afghanistan and its neighboring countries are sizing up the war, check out the Voices That Must Be Heard project at www.indypress.org. The site offers translations from New York–based South Asian and Middle Eastern papers.

Interested in a primary-source approach to U.S. foreign policy history? George Washington University's National Security Archive (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/) retools the historical record by evaluating government documents, many newly released to the public.

Brickbats

Want to work for the government of Temple Terrace, Florida? Quit smoking. The city now bans the hiring of smokers, even if they light up only in their own homes. City Councilman Joe Affronti says the policy is actually in smokers' best interest: "It boggles my mind when people know of all the health problems," he says, "and they continue to smoke."

When you're at war with theocrats, how do you stand up for your freedoms? Apparently, by forcing school kids to pray. Spurred by the September 11 attacks, several states and towns across the nation have attempted to bring prayer back into public schools. "Our children need and deserve to live in a country of renewed spirit which will help bind us as one," says one California school board member.

Meanwhile, Iran's fundamentalist judiciary has shut down more than 50 newspapers "for God's sake." Nearly all of the papers support greater freedom and democracy.

A traditional school science project may soon be outlawed by the Agriculture Department. To protect the endangered milkweed, the USDA wants to ban the release of Monarch butterflies, which feed on the plant. Kids would still be able to feed caterpillars and watch them morph into butterflies, but they'd have to kill the winged creatures when they reach adulthood.

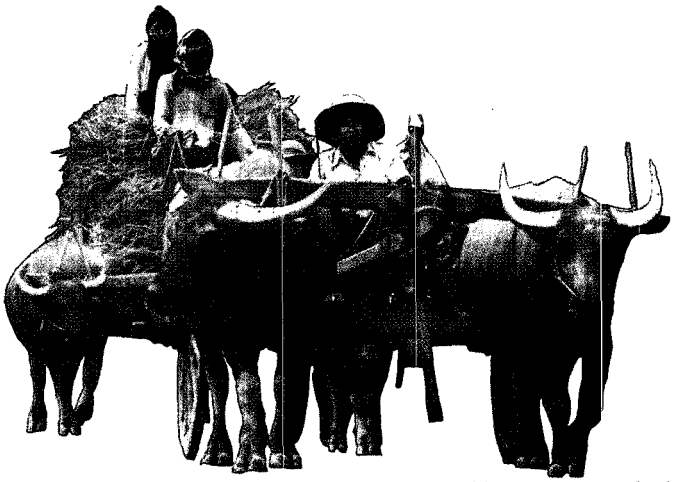
Mayor Carolyn Risher has banned Satan from Inglis, Florida. No word on whether Satan plans to appeal.

Racism and xenophobia could soon become crimes in Europe. Laws being drafted by the European Commission would punish with up to two years in prison aversion to individuals based on "race, colour, descent, religion or belief and national or ethnic origin." The proposed legislation bans "public insults" of minority groups as well as "public dissemination of tracts, pictures or other material containing expressions of racism or xenophobia." Holocaust deniers and political parties that oppose mass immigration would also be specifically restricted.

When state troopers heard that Round Rock, Texas, was hosting one of the nation's largest modified-car shows, they saw a lucrative opportunity to enforce "public safety." Four troopers parked near the show's entrance, citing anyone with illegal alterations, such as blue turn signals or low suspensions. At times, the traffic stretched more than three miles, but the officers persisted. All told, they wrote 139 tickets and issued 90 warnings in three days. Organizers of the show say they may not come back to Texas.

Christians in Laos are being forced to renounce their faith. That's not new for the country, where communist hardliners have long tried to enforce atheism. But lately, the government has started to ease its stance on Buddhism and animism: Authorities are looking the other way when animists try to force Christians (sometimes at gunpoint) to sacrifice animals, drink blood, and speak to spirits.

Charles Oliver



› starting point because it marked the emergence of what they contend is a truly global economy. "International commodity price convergence did not start until then," they write. "And [an] epochal move towards liberal policy (e.g., dismantling mercantilism) was manifested during that decade." Their analysis finds that "globalization favors all participants who liberalize, especially those who are newly industrializing, and penalizes those who choose not to liberalize, leaving them behind."

Lindert and Williamson concede that the research done so far cannot authoritatively isolate increased international trade (one of the defining characteristics of "globalization") from all other factors as the cause of rising incomes. But "though no one study can establish that trade openness has unambiguously helped the representative Third World economy," they write, "the preponderance of evidence supports this conclusion." They also note that no country that has been more protectionist in the 1990s than in the 1960s has simultaneously raised its standard of living.

The feds vs. medical pot

One Toke over the Line

Sara Rimensnyder

LAST MAY, THE U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the feds could shut down six California co-ops that were distributing medical marijuana in accordance with state law. Back in 1996, Golden State voters had overwhelmingly passed Proposition 215, allowing patients with a doctor's recommendation to use pot for serious medical conditions such as chronic pain and severe nausea. In effect, the nation's highest court decided that state laws legalizing cannabis for medical use weren't worth a dime bag.

In the aftermath of the May ruling, patrons and proprietors of California's 50-odd medical marijuana clinics waited anxiously to see how aggressive the federal crackdown would be. In October the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) began to answer that question. Agents surveilled or busted several co-ops, finishing their tour with the Los Angeles Cannabis Resource Center, a West Hollywood clinic that provided pot on site to 960 patients suffering from AIDS, epilepsy, cancer, glaucoma, and other serious illnesses. Thirty armed federal agents seized 400 marijuana plants, computers, financial documents, and medical records.

On December 10, authorities informed Scott Imler, the co-op's director and founder, that he would face a grand jury on December 20. At press time, he was still awaiting its decision on whether to indict him for defying the Supreme Court ruling, a charge for which he could face hard time.

"I don't want to whine or duck here," says the 43-year-old Imler, his voice suggesting the bemusement of someone who's facing up to 10 years in prison »

Balance Sheet

Jeff A. Taylor

The Bush administration relaxes Cold War–era computer export rules. Now countries such as Russia, Israel, China, India, and Pakistan can get more-powerful boxes, but truly high-end computers still need approval.

The feds drop charges against a Russian computer programmer accused of violating copyrights on Adobe's e-book software. Dmitry Sklyarov, 27, endured the first criminal prosecution under the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

God is alive and well on the Net, suggests a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Religious cruising, mostly for info, is more popular than gambling, banking, or trading stocks. Every day some 3 million U.S. adults find religious information online, up from 2 million in 2000.

Big Brother may be watching, but he can't find anything. The National Archives and Records Administration concludes that most federal agencies can't handle electronic records. Feds may create documents in digital formats but then print them on paper and bury them in storage. And some formats, such as e-mail, are simply destroyed.

Radio space slowly trickles out as the Federal Communications Commission frees more of the spectrum for real-world uses. Private firms say new ultra-broadband technology will be the fastest yet. But large chunks of air space are still wasted on clunkers like digital television.

A Florida company designs radio-frequency chips that work inside human tissue. Applied Digital Solutions says its VeriChip can store information about a patient's pacemaker, defibrillator, or artificial joint. But the company has hinted at a more widespread use: implanted identification.

Three college students run afoul of a Utah town's dance hall ordinance. Public parties without metal detectors, state-certified security guards, and surveillance cameras are illegal in Provo. Only church, school, or government hoedowns are exempt. The Internet church the students claim to represent doesn't count.

Forget yakking on a cell phone. A messy burrito is enough to get you pulled over in New Hampshire. Negligent driving is now illegal in the Granite State, with cops empowered to punish distractions like eating with fines of up to $1,000.

Congress approves its third pay increase in four years, making the salary for senators and representatives an even $150,000 a year. Wartime sacrifice is not under consideration, unlike during World War II, when Congress passed a pay freeze, or the Depression, during which the gilded domers cut their salaries twice.

Government scientists planted samples of lynx fur on public lands in Washington state, finds the U.S. Forest Service. A national survey of the endangered cat's range will set land use restrictions in 16 states. The scientists remain on the job as Congress gets involved.

Data

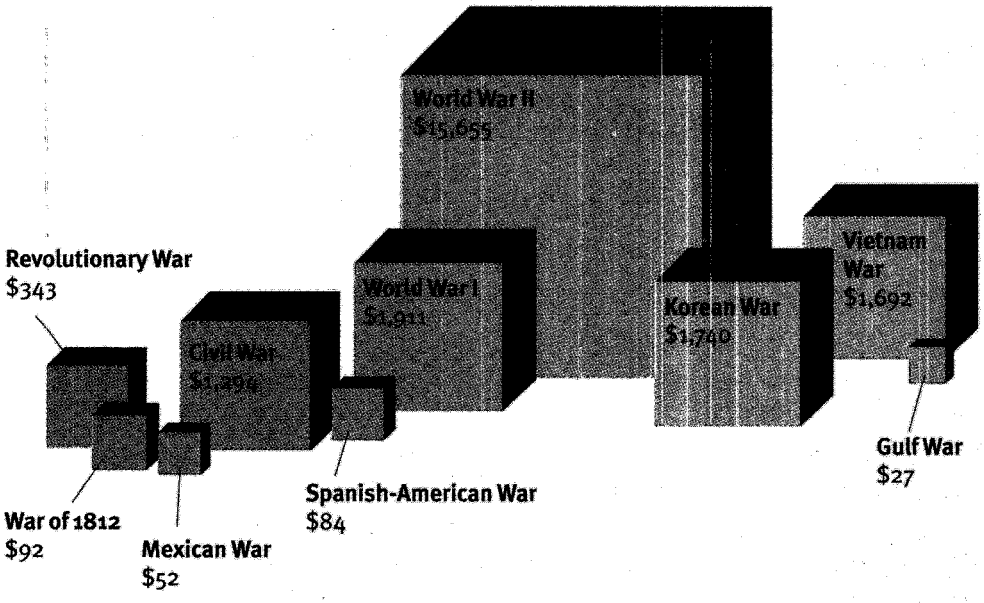
The Price of War

Michael W. Lynch

There's no way to account for the true costs of war. These include not only the direct expenditures on munitions, the lost production of useful things while soldiers are deployed killing, and the permanent lost output of those who never return, but also the emotional costs of worry and disruption borne by those who serve and those who stay behind.

Some direct costs can be measured, albeit without much precision. The costs of U.S. wars per capita have ranged from a low of $27 for the Gulf War (our allies picked up all but $7 billion of the $61 billion total) to $15,655 per head to wrap up World War II. We've yet to tally the bill for our current campaign against terrorism, but it's estimated to be costing $1.2 billion a month more than the military's peacetime budget.

Per Capita Cost of War in 1990 Dollars



Source: United States Civil War Center, Louisiana State University

› for helping sick people. "I knew what I was getting into, and I'm prepared to take whatever responsibility comes my way. But I would imagine...they're focusing on me because the minute they raise the issue of conspirators, it would be a whole different kettle of fish."

Imler is referring to the co-op's wide swath of supporters. In addition to employing several staff members, the Cannabis Resource Center was created with the close cooperation of the city council and local law enforcement agencies. If the federal government tries to hone in on "co-conspirators," it may well have to indict the entire paid staff of the city of West Hollywood (an independent municipality surrounded by Los Angeles).

Elsewhere in California, co-ops continue to treat the patients who depend on them amid growing uncertainty. Says the Rev. Lynnette Shaw, founder of the Marin County Alliance of Medical Marijuana: "Mostly, we're all very worried on behalf of the patients. If the DEA closes everybody, it will throw all those patients back into the arms of the gangsters. And that's exactly what the gangsters want. So in a sense, the DEA is working for the gangsters." ◻

Metal-headed cartels

Cold Steel

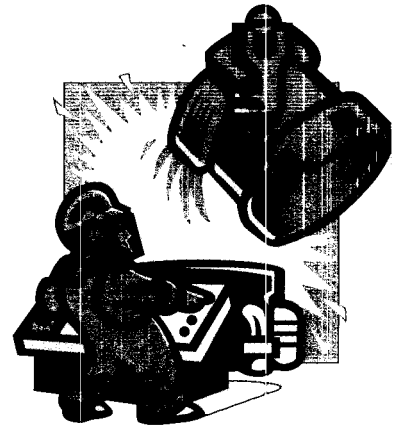
Michael W. Lynch

"WE HAVE AN answer for the crisis in American steel," Robert S. Miller Jr., the recently installed CEO of the bankrupt Bethlehem Steel Corp., told *The New York Times* in December. "It is the consolidation and the rationalization of the integrated steel industry by a combination of four or five companies to come together as a large integrated steel company."

The plan on the table is for the merger of USX-U.S. Steel Corp. and Bethlehem, with the possible inclusion of Weirton Steel Corp. and Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corp. The new company would account for roughly 30 percent of U.S. steel production.

That would certainly help things in the notoriously fragmented and oversupplied industry. But as usual, there's a catch. Miller, who helped craft the 1979 federal bailout of Chrysler, wants the government's help: He says the new company will need protection from imports. Taxpayers must also pick up the $13 billion tab for the industry's pension and retiree health care benefits.

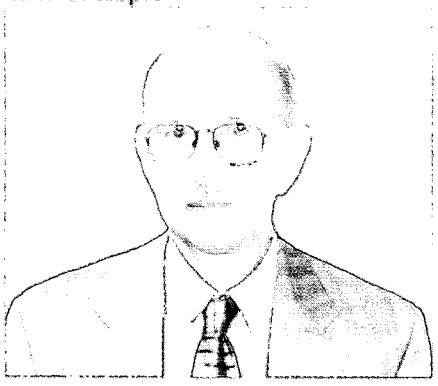
It's a gutsy offer. The captains of this floundering industry are asking for nothing less than national industrial socialism, a government-protected cartel that benefits a few producers at the expense of the rest of the country. Treasury Secretary Paul H. O'Neill is already acting as if he were an OPEC production minister. "O'Neill has been seeking greater balance among global steel makers by encouraging countries and companies to reduce production to stabilize prices," reports the *Times*. "He has also threatened to restrict the entry of steel imports to the United States."



Is protecting the steel industry a national security interest? Nope: The U.S. military uses very little, only 0.02 percent of domestic steel delivered. "The military argument is not only bogus," notes Dan Griswold, associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies, "but insofar as it's significant it cuts the other way." Why, after all, would we want our military to pay inflated prices on a major purchase?

Drug War Heretic

Nick Gillespie



Peter Reuter

Few topics generate more bad trips than drug policy, with prohibitionists often acting like the wigged-out PCP users who still haunt drug-czar-approved TV scripts. For their part, legalizers sometimes substitute outrage for command of the relevant facts. Into such a trippy arena comes *Drug War Heresies: Learning from Other Vices, Times, and Places* (Cambridge University Press).

Written by Robert J. MacCoun and Peter Reuter—professors of public policy at the University of California and the University of Maryland—the book is a detailed and dispassionate discussion of how the U.S. might best decide the legal status of drugs. Whether drug warriors will respect the authors' conclusion that current drug policies need to be rethought—and whether legalizers will applaud the relatively modest reforms supported by MacCoun and Reuter—is anybody's guess. But both camps would do well to come to terms with the wealth of information and analysis in *Drug War Heresies*.

reason Editor-in-Chief Nick Gillespie spoke with Peter Reuter in December.

Q: What other vices, times, and places are most relevant to current U.S. drug policy?

A: Vices include alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and prostitution. Times include America when cocaine was legal. And places include Western Europe, where over the past two decades there has been a shift from very tough prohibition to some notably different regimes.

The question with all of these is, What can we learn from these different experiences? There are different tradeoffs with all policies, and there should be some experiments here.

Q: You and your co-author strive for balance but admit that your "own sympathies are with the reform effort, at least in its best intentioned, least dogmatic form." Why?

A: The string of negative adjectives to describe current policies is endless. Maybe we are better off with current policies than with legalization. But surely there are other, more effective ways of limiting or prohibiting drug use or its negative outcomes. We're not all that concrete on what those things are, but they include, for example, arresting fewer people.

Q: Where do you see drug policy going?

A: Until a year or so ago, unrelenting pessimism toward any change was warranted. Polls suggest that there is enough popular discontent that you can imagine a change to more freedom in some areas, especially related to medical uses of marijuana. The public believes nothing works, but they don't necessarily want to try something very different. It was a six-year struggle to change the strict Rockefeller laws in New York, and there's still an extraordinarily harsh regime in place. On the federal level, I can't see any change for a very long time.

Don't drink the water

Aqua-Terror

Brian Doherty

MANY LIBRARIANS were appalled when the call came from the federal government: Destroy all copies of a CD containing a U.S. Geological Survey document with information on public water supplies. Officials assured the librarians that the step was vital to protecting Americans against looming terrorist threats.

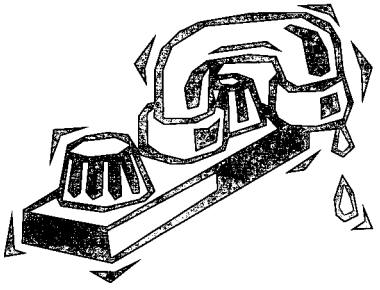
The notion that we'll suddenly find our drinking water delivering death instead of refreshment is among the more baroquely unsettling of post-9/11 fears. But is the threat to our water supply serious enough to wipe the historical record? The House of Representatives appears to think the problem is at least worth throwing some money at. In December, it passed a bill that would dedicate $120 million to assess our water systems' vulnerability to terrorist assaults.

The water treatment and delivery industries themselves have long been abuzz about bioterrorism. The Water Quality Association (WQA), a trade group for the water treatment industry, has admitted that it has never bothered to test whether typical treatment procedures could handle the sort of exotic toxins or bioweapons that terrorists might wield (although the WQA suspects current systems probably would do the job in most cases).

Yet the consensus among industry insiders seems to be that terrorists would most likely get far more bang for their buck by aiming their villainy elsewhere—at least when it comes to *contaminating* our water supply. On the other hand, assaults aimed at *destroying* water mains or treatment plants to disrupt the flow of water could be singularly devastating, especially when combined with arson. But the threat raises no water-specific security issues. As with any structure, only vigilance, guards, and barricades could prevent such attacks.

By contrast, the deadliness of contaminants added to reservoirs or water sources would most likely be neutralized by dilution and standard water treatment. Downstream contamination generally would require sophisticated pumping devices to inject mass quantities of a poison against the water pressure, and it would only hit limited numbers of consumers, not entire cities.

Tampering outside the treatment plant with chemical additives like fluoride and chlorine would be the best bet for would-be killers. But standard monitoring devices that measure the proper levels of those additives probably would quickly alert the plant to such adulteration.



Gun Control's New Language

How anti-terror rhetoric is being used against the Second Amendment.

AS THE NEW congressional session gets into gear, a freshly invigorated gun control movement is preparing to act. Armed with a few questionable studies, some acid-tongued rhetoric, and vague allusions to the War on Terrorism, the anti-gun lobby is expected to hammer away relentlessly at the capital's most prominent Second Amendment stalwart, Attorney General John Ashcroft. The former Missouri senator should find their tactics familiar: He developed a similar strategy in his own quest for expanded powers against terrorism last fall, and it appears that his very success in that campaign will serve as a road map for gun control.

Give the gun control lobby credit for adopting a model that worked. Ashcroft's success in bulldozing the USA PATRIOT Act through the House and Senate was nothing short of a political rout. Even in the days immediately following September 11, many Americans were concerned that an expansion of federal power would come at the expense of civil liberties. An unlikely coalition that included the American Civil Liberties Union and Phyllis Schlafly's conservative Eagle Forum called for careful deliberation. A band of Senate Democrats, led by Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), promised to deliver just that. By early December, however, Ashcroft had crushed his opposition. Here are the hard lessons his foes learned in that battle—and are already using against him to pursue their own interests.

Exhibit 1 is the "Use NICS in Terrorist Investigations Act," introduced in December by anti-gun senators including Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.). The measure would force the Justice Department to maintain the records it generates when conducting federally mandated background checks on gun purchasers (the National Instant Criminal Background Check System). Ashcroft has steadfastly refused to use NICS, noting correctly that the records were intended to be destroyed lest they become a de facto national gun registry. But gun controllers argue this policy doesn't even make sense in normal times, and anyway, just look at the World Trade Center! They say federal investigators must preserve and pore over the records that are supposed to be destroyed once a buyer is approved. That way, dutiful snoops can see if any of the hundreds of alien detainees in custody have ever purchased a firearm.

Despite the timely nod to last fall's attacks, the same senators have in fact been trying to use NICS in criminal investigations for years. Take a peek at Schumer and Kennedy's proposed legislation. Section 3 is titled "Gun Sale Anti-Fraud and Privacy Protection." It bears a striking resemblance to the "Gun-Sale Anti-Fraud and Privacy Protection Act" the senators proposed in July. Both bills propose to protect Americans' privacy by making sure the federal government keeps track of how many guns they buy.

Who else has had the gall to rehash old pet projects under the guise of the War on Terrorism? John Ashcroft. In fact, he delivered a masterstroke in this regard. For decades federal law enforcement officials had been clamoring—unsuccessfully—for more surveillance, interrogation, and incarceration powers. Enter Osama bin Laden. Now, call it the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act of 2001," and you're in business. How effective was Ashcroft's strategy? In November, the *Chicago Tribune* quoted an exasperated Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.), the only senator to vote against the

new powers: "The naming of the bill ...is the kind of cynical game played to intimidate people into not only not voting against it, but not debating it or questioning it." People who hate guns understand how powerful the anti-terrorism angle can be, and they are acting accordingly.

But Schumer and his cohorts have done far more than copy Ashcroft's "cynical game." They have aped his style as well. During the early days of his campaign for expanded power, the attorney general regularly shrugged off a seemingly important question posed by members of the Judiciary Committee: Would such powers have enabled the Justice Department to stop the September 11 attacks? Rather than wrestle with these inquiries, Ashcroft simply admitted that he didn't know, stressing instead that there wasn't any time to ruminate on such trifles. Every minute his department went without the far-reaching new powers was another minute the terrorists had "a comparative advantage."

Fast forward to December 13. In a press release pressuring Ashcroft to keep and use the NICS records, Schumer argued that "every day the FBI is barred from using this information, the investigatory trail grows colder." But is that true? NICS does not keep records on people who purchase box cutters. Accused shoe bomber Richard Reid presumably secured his plastic explosives through someone other than a federally licensed gun dealer. The anti-gun movement has been citing a few studies done by hard-line disarmers at the Violence Policy Center and Americans for Gun Safety. These supposedly link terrorists to guns bought in the U.S., but the fact remains that so far all the damage has been done by airborne goons with ordinary household implements, not firearms. But Schumer, like Ashcroft before him, has no time for such quibbles.

The anti-gun forces have plenty of time for overblown rhetoric—which is perhaps the most important page they've copied from John Ashcroft's playbook.

What the anti-gun forces do have time for is overblown rhetoric—which is perhaps the most important page they have copied from Ashcroft's political playbook. The attorney general certainly set a blistering precedent. Throughout his struggle last fall, he regularly chided legislators, accusing them of stalling and thus hampering his ability to chase down

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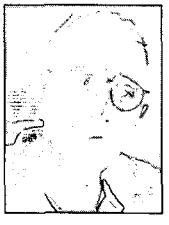

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threats to the nation. The rhetoric reached a crescendo in late November and early December, when the Senate Judiciary Committee scheduled four separate hearings to question Ashcroft about the administration's proposal for military tribunals, his own refusal to release any information on the hundreds of people in custody, and maneuvers such as monitoring conversations between detainees and their lawyers.

At least that was the plan. In fact, the early hearings resembled junior varsity matches before the big game. Instead of Chairman Leahy vs. Ashcroft, the eager chattering classes got lower-ranking committee members trading flaccid barbs with the attorney general's lieutenants. When the big boys finally took the field on December 6, everyone in Washington tuned in to see the fireworks, only to see Ashcroft turn the tables and deliver a memorable drubbing.

Buoyed by public opinion polls that showed overwhelming support for his policies, Ashcroft went on the offensive. "To those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty," he said in his opening statement, "my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve." On the issue of subjecting simply cracked wise: "Are we supposed to read them their Miranda rights, hire a flamboyant defense lawyer, bring them back to the United States to create a new cable network of Osama TV?" Fully aware of the same opinion polls bolstering Ashcroft, Leahy and the rest of the committee wilted. The only concessions Feingold managed to elicit were an assurance that Ashcroft wasn't referring to committee members in his diatribe and a promise to put a little more thought into the military tribunals.

Instead of nailing Ashcroft for shredding the Constitution, Sens. Kennedy and Schumer scolded him for leaving out the Second Amendment.

Live television coverage cut out long before the gavel finally fell on the four-hour hearing, but not before recording a subtle indication that a few of the senators had learned a thing or two from Ashcroft. Instead of nailing him for shredding the Constitution, Kennedy and Schumer scolded him for leaving out the Second Amendment. The morning of the hearing, *The New York Times* had published an article detailing how Ashcroft had refused FBI requests to open the NICS files to terrorism investigators. Schumer accused the administration of being a "wet noodle" on the issue. Kennedy piled on, and a press release issued after the hearings showed that he smelled blood: The first 10 or so paragraphs deal exclusively with the NICS controversy and—surprise—the purported "gun show loophole" that has long been a thorn in the anti-gun crowd's side. Concerns about tribunals and due process violations are relegated to the end.

The next day, Schumer, Kennedy, and friends submitted their NICS proposal to the Senate, recasting it as a tool in the fight against terrorism. Since then, gun prohibitionists around the country have tried their best to match Ashcroft's tough-guy rhetoric. "Ashcroft guns to seal image as far-right nut," snarled the headline of an editorial in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The *Boston Globe*'s Thomas Oliphant wrote an op-ed citing "Ashcroft's Gun-Coddling Hypocrisy." A piece in *USA Today* equaled Ashcroft's own diatribe at the December 6 hearings: "When the next act of terrorism involving conventional weapons occurs, here or abroad, the gun lobby might just be an accessory."

Under ordinary circumstances, Ashcroft could easily shrug off this new clamor by arguing that the proposed measures are constitutionally suspect and would have done nothing to stop the September 11 attacks. Or he could make the point that the anti-gun crowd is dressing tired old measures in anti-terror clothing. He might even gain some sympathy by complaining that the personal attacks levied against him are way out of line. And he would be right.

Unfortunately, the gun control lobby learned its new tactics by watching the master himself pull these same stunts just a few months ago.

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Windbags of War

Even after September 11, left-wing McCarthyism persists on American campuses.

SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER the September 11 tragedy, the response on America's college campuses to the terrorist attacks and the subsequent war has become the center of controversy. Some charge that the groves of academe have become a haven for virulent, knee-jerk anti-Americanism. Others worry that wartime jingoism threatens to eviscerate freedom of speech in the very place where it should be most hallowed.

In the first camp is the Washington, D.C.–based American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), which issued a report in November titled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America—And What Can Be Done About It." In the second camp are numerous critics, from *Chicago Tribune* columnist Clarence Page to Don Campbell, a lecturer in journalism at Emory University in Atlanta, who see such accusations as an attempt to launch new McCarthy-style witch hunts.

ACTA, a joint undertaking of Republicans and culturally conservative Democrats (it was cofounded in 1995 by future Second Lady Lynne Cheney and future vice presidential candidate Sen. Joseph Lieberman), sees the climate at many institutions of higher learning as rife with moral relativism at best and America-hating at worst. In the words of the report, "the message of much of academe was clear: BLAME AMERICA FIRST." More than 100 comments and incidents from campuses across the country are cataloged to support this claim.

While such a list may seem to have McCarthyesque overtones, the ACTA report doesn't name names, only institutions. A more valid criticism, perhaps, is that the report is a tempest in a teapot. Page, Campbell, and others point out that anti-war fervor has been notoriously lacking on most campuses, and that the list is heavy on vague, not particularly radical statements about breaking the cycle of violence and finding alternatives to war.

It is true that many of the protests mentioned in the report were sparsely attended. It is also true that some of the incriminating statements quoted in it are fairly innocuous. The list includes hackneyed peace rally chants such as, "What do we want? Peace! When do we want it? Now!" and wishy-washy platitudes such as, "We have to learn to use courage for peace instead of war." It also features such inspired silliness as a linguistics professor's attempt to find sexual metaphors in the attacks ("The Pentagon, a vaginal image from the air, penetrated by the plane as missile"). Even some hapless student's comment to the *Los Angeles Times* ("I'll pretend I'm gay. I'm against war. It's scary.") made the cut.

But while the authors of the ACTA report weaken their own case by making such a muddle of the evidence, it is disingenuous to pretend—as do some of the report's critics—that all the evidence is feeble. "Defending Civilization" clearly identifies a real problem. An alarming proportion of campus voices heard since September 11 have drawn a moral equivalence between the terrorist attacks and America's response, and sometimes transparently implied that we were asking for it. For instance:

- "Perhaps our best options now are to search for the origins of this new war, draw strength from understanding our own weaknesses, and make changes within ourselves and within our relationships to others. Many wonder if we are paying an accumulated debt for centuries of dominance and intervention far from home, retribution for our culture of consumption and exploitation."
- "The ultimate responsibility lies with the

rulers of this country, the capitalist ruling class of this country."

• "If I were President, I would first apologize to all the widows and orphans, the tortured and impoverished, and all the millions of other victims of American imperialism."

There is ample evidence that attitudes illustrated by these examples were predominant at the teach-ins and speak-outs organized at many colleges and universities in the wake of September 11. Some of the participants, of course, bristle at being called anti-American.

One Wesleyan College sophomore, writing in the student daily *The Wesleyan Argus*, indignantly protested against charges that an anti-war event in which he was involved was about making excuses for terrorist attacks on America. He then went on to state that "it is understandable why America was targeted" and that "when we enter [Third World] countries to rape the land of its resources and leave it barren, we are being watched and we are being judged." If anything, such cognitive dissonance is even scarier than outright support for terrorism.

There is a world of difference between questioning government policies, even in wartime, and questioning America's moral right to self-defense. Too often, what passes for dissent in academe today is much closer to self-hatred.

ACTA stresses that its report is "not an argument for limiting free speech" on campus. But as the report correctly notes, "Academic freedom does not mean freedom from criticism."

The cries of neo-McCarthyism are particularly ironic since many of the incidents chronicled in the report are not about offensive anti-war or anti-American speech. Rather, they have to do with *attacks on* free speech—not by overzealous patriots but by proponents of multicultural sensitivity.

Thus, the student newspaper at the University of California at Berkeley, *The Daily Californian*, came under fire for running a cartoon that showed the dead hijackers arriving in hell while imagining that they were about to meet Allah and be serviced by 70 virgins in paradise. This supposed act of anti-Muslim "intolerance" sparked a protest rally about 100 strong. The U.C.-Berkeley Student Senate passed a resolution, by 11 to seven votes, demanding a front-page apology and diversity training for the paper's staff; it also proposed raising the paper's rent as punishment for the cartoon. The editors, to their credit, held their ground, saying the cartoon fell within the realm of fair political commentary.

At several schools, including Central Michigan University and Florida Gulf Coast University, administrators banned the display of American flags, pro-war posters, and stickers saying "Proud to Be an American" on the grounds that foreign students might be offended. (In most cases, such directives were reversed after a public outcry). At Duke, a professor's Web site was shut down after he endorsed strong military action against countries that sponsor terrorism; it was later reinstated, but with an unprecedented disclaimer that the views promoted on it do not reflect those of the university.

Perhaps the most outrageous case is that of Kenneth Hearlson, a political science professor at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, California, who had the temerity to say in his "Contemporary Politics" class a week after September 11 that Muslims who failed to condemn radical Islamic terrorism were in effect condoning it. Four Muslim students in the class lodged a complaint, claiming that Hearlson had called them "terrorists" and "Nazis," accusing them of direct complicity in the World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings.

Hearlson was immediately put on paid leave. Luckily for him, an audiotape of the class showed that he did not accuse any student, directly or indirectly, of being a terrorist. While the professor was reinstated, he still received a letter of reprimand from the school for potentially offensive classroom remarks. His accusers, meanwhile, suffered no penalty for making demonstrably false charges.

There have been troubling attacks on free speech from pro-war quarters as well, such as the appalling incident in which *Sacramento Bee* publisher Janis Besler Heaphy, a commencement speaker at California State University at Sacramento, was heckled and booed off the stage after she expressed concern that civil liberties might be endangered in the war effort. (Attorney General John Ashcroft's recent admonition to those who express concern about the erosion of liberty that "your tactics only aid terrorists" is not that far removed from the hecklers' mentality.)

At the same time, it seems clear that campus political correctness, 1990s-style, is alive and well today. Even after the attacks on America, this left-wing brand of McCarthyism has lost none of its self-righteousness or intolerance.

Contributing Editor Cathy Young (Cathy Young2@cs.com) writes a column for The Boston Globe.

PETA

"I openly hope that it comes here."

— Ingrid Newkirk, PETA Co-Founder, on her desire for a USA hoof-and-mouth epidemic

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French Miss

Going Continental won't make air travelers safe.

THERE'S A CERTAIN type of American sophisticate who rhapsodizes about how wonderful and civilized Europe is in comparison with his own land of the free. Like high school French Club presidents who pompously describe the day's cafeteria offerings as lacking "a certain *je ne sais quoi*," such people can't stop talking about how *magnifique* it would be if the United States got in line with the Continent on everything from government-mandated maternity leave to long, wine-soaked lunches.

Since September 11, members of the Beret of the Month Club have discovered a new fault in the American way of doing things. The country's airports, they complain, have been guarded all these years by poorly skilled workers employed by private companies. When Europhiles head over to Paris or Rome for their annual vacations, one of the first things they notice on the ground is the number of armed police swaggering around the airport with automatic weapons.

"America's airport security is shockingly lax," Gregg Easterbrook declared in *The New Republic* shortly after the attacks. In contrast, he wrote, "Within sight of security checkpoints in most European airports are police with assault rifles, wearing armor vests....Once, in France, I was asked to turn on my sniper-bullet-shaped pocket flashlight to demonstrate that it really was a flashlight." A nice story, but it's hard to believe that even before September 11 the most illiterate minimum-wage screener in the U.S. wouldn't have raised an eyebrow if you had thrown faux ammo in the dish with your change.

Easterbrook's widely echoed feeling that he is safer in Europe is only a feeling, one that is demonstrably misguided. In Europe, governments set standards for aviation security (just as in America). And private companies actually do the work of screening passengers (just as in America—at least until recently). It's worth noting that French cops—public employees, every man Jacques of them—allowed would-be shoe bomber Richard C. Reid to board an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami in December. What's more, the French police's OK came after the private employees of American Airlines demanded further scrutiny of their oddly acting passenger (who paid for his ticket in cash and checked no bags).

In any case, Reid's conning of French cops came after Congress passed a law nationalizing airport security. In November, the House and Senate came to terms on an aviation security bill that made baggage screeners federal employees and set new minimum standards for such workers. The standards required that all screeners possess a high school diploma or its equivalent. Realizing that such a stringent requirement would have resulted in an immediate canning of a quarter of the workforce, regulators decreed that a year of experience staring at an X-ray machine screen was the equivalent of a GED.

In other words, those who said the legislation would do nothing for security—those who were accused of, as Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) put it, "putting...a private profit ahead of public protection"—turned out to be right. The only outcome is a fatter government payroll, not a fitter work force.

Ultimately, though, it may not matter who pays the checkers or whether they went to high school. The U.S. civil aviation system is an awesomely big affair that moves far too many passengers every day for it to be possible to plug every leak without imposing crippling costs and delays on a prime mover of the country and the world. What that means is that we must all continue to take our exceedingly good chances, and as passengers we must all be en garde.

Richard Reid's shoe bomb probably would have made it past a battalion of Ph.D. civil servants confiscating nail clippers. It was attentive airline employees who first realized he needed scrutiny, and it was vigilant passengers and crew who kept him from detonating his bomb. Just as passengers did their duty on United Flight 93 and prevented it from hitting terrorist targets, in what is today properly remembered as a stunning act of American private enterprise. R

James Morrow (jamesmorrow123@aol.com) is a writer based in Sydney, Australia, and New York City.

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THE WAR ON TERROR NEVER ENDS

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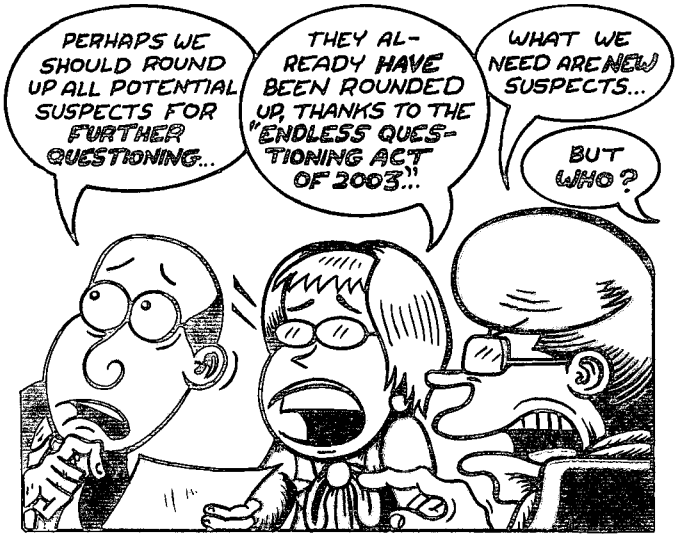
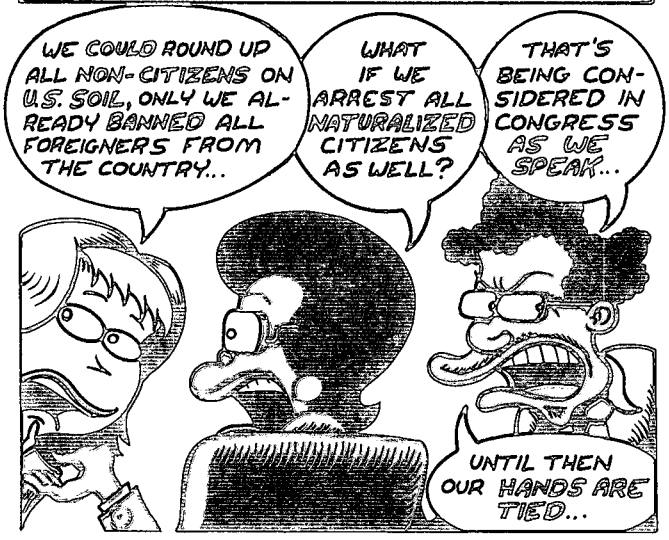
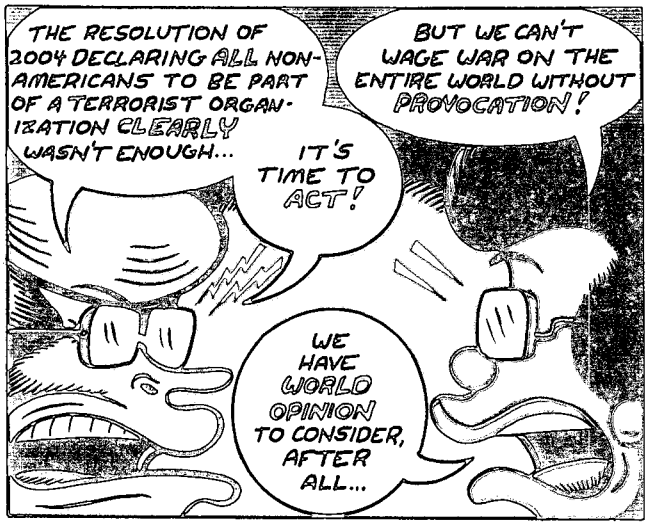
SOMEWHERE IN WASHINGTON, D.C., 2006AD...

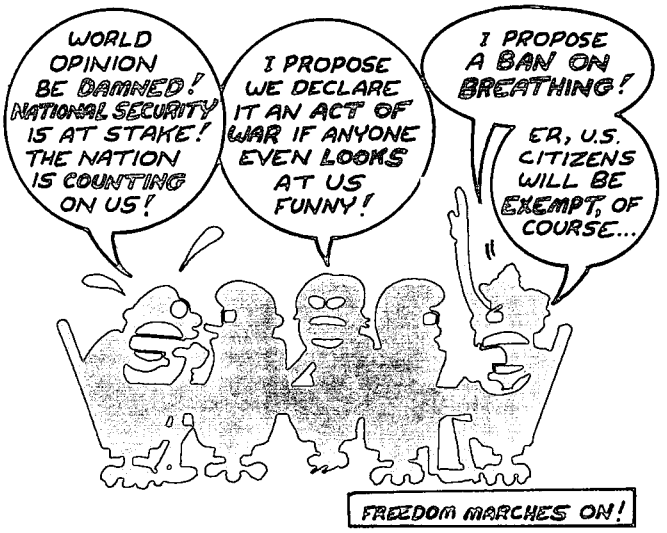
IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE THE SEPT. 11th ATTACKS, BUT THE FBI SAYS THERE'S STILL A 0.3% CHANCE OF FUTURE ATTACKS...
THAT FIGURE IS UNACCEPTABLE!
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE!


PERHAPS WE SHOULD ROUND UP ALL POTENTIAL SUSPECTS FOR FURTHER QUESTIONING...
THEY ALREADY HAVE BEEN ROUNDED UP, THANKS TO THE "ENDLESS QUESTIONING ACT OF 2003"!
WHAT WE NEED ARE NEW SUSPECTS...
BUT WHO?


WE COULD ROUND UP ALL NON-CITIZENS ON U.S. SOIL, ONLY WE ALREADY BANNED ALL FOREIGNERS FROM THE COUNTRY...
WHAT IF WE ARREST ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS AS WELL?
THAT'S BEING CONSIDERED IN CONGRESS AS WE SPEAK...
UNTIL THEN OUR HANDS ARE TIED...

THE REAL PROBLEM IS NON-U.S. CITIZENS LIVING IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES!
HEAR! HEAR!
THEY POSE THE GREATEST THREAT TO OUR CHERISHED LIBERTIES!
POUND!
ONLY WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THEM?


THE RESOLUTION OF 2004 DECLARING ALL NON-AMERICANS TO BE PART OF A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION CLEARLY WASN'T ENOUGH...
IT'S TIME TO ACT!
BUT WE CAN'T WAGE WAR ON THE ENTIRE WORLD WITHOUT PROVOCATION!
WE HAVE WORLD OPINION TO CONSIDER, AFTER ALL...


WORLD OPINION BE DAMNED! NATIONAL SECURITY IS AT STAKE! THE NATION IS COUNTING ON US!
I PROPOSE WE DECLARE IT AN ACT OF WAR IF ANYONE EVEN LOOKS AT US FUNNY!
I PROPOSE A BAN ON BREATHING!
ER, U.S. CITIZENS WILL BE EXEMPT, OF COURSE...
FREEDOM MARCHES ON!

In Praise of Vulgarity

How commercial culture liberates Islam—and the West

Charles Paul Freund

WHO WILL EVER forget the strangeness of the first images out of post-Taliban Afghanistan, when the streets ran with beards? As one city after another was abandoned by Taliban soldiers, crowds of happy men lined up to get their first legal shave in years, and barbers enjoyed the busiest days of their lives.

Only a few months earlier, in January 2001, dozens of barbers in the capital city of Kabul had been rounded up by the Taliban's hair-and-beard cops (the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) because they had been cutting men's hair in a style known locally as the "Titanic." At the time, Kabul's cooler young men wanted that Leonardo DiCaprio look, the one he sported in the movie. It was an interesting moment in fashion, because under the Taliban's moral regime movies were illegal, Leonardo DiCaprio was illegal, and his hairdo, which allowed strands

Scott Peterson / Getty Images

of hair to fall forward over the face during prayer, was a ticket to jail. Yet thanks to enterprising video smugglers who dragged cassettes over mountain trails by mule, urban Afghans knew perfectly well who DiCaprio was and what he looked like; not only did men adopt his style, but couples were then celebrating their weddings with Titanic-shaped cakes.

DiCaprio was out of style, even in Kabul, by the time the Taliban's rules were being swept away along with the nation's beard clippings. Men were now measuring their freedom by the smoothness of their chins. "I hated this beard," one happy Afghan told an A.P. reporter. Being shaved was "like being free."

Although it's omitted from the monuments and the rhetoric of liberation, brutal tyrannies have ended on exactly this note before. When Paris was liberated from the Nazis, for example, one Parisian cadged a Lucky Strike from an American reporter, the first cigarette he'd had in a long, long time. As he gratefully exhaled, the Frenchman smiled and told the reporter, "It's the taste of freedom."

Afghan women, of course, removed their burqas, if they chose to, and put on makeup again. But some Afghan women had been breaking the morals laws throughout the period of Taliban bleakness; according to a memorable CNN documentary titled *Beneath the Veil,* they did so at the risk of flogging or even amputation. Courageous women had not only been educating their daughters in secret, but had also been visiting illegal underground cosmetic parlors for the simple pleasure of self-ornamentation and the assertion of self-fashioned identity that lies behind it. (See "Free Hand," page 82.)

Still other Afghans filled the air with music. The most frequently played tapes, according to press reports, featured the songs of the late Ahmed Zaher, a 1970s celebrity in the Western style. *The Village Voice* has described Zaher as "Afghanistan's Crosby, Presley, and Marley rolled into one," and credited him with introducing original pop compositions into the nation's culture (before Zaher, the usual practice had been to record classical verses set to traditional instrumentation). Enthusiasm for Zaher's work—including his English-language covers of American hits such as "It's Now or Never"—was one of the few things that the country's many ethnic groups had in common. The model of celebrity he established was later imitated by other local singers, including, notably, women.

Afghan shop windows suddenly displayed blow-ups of Indian actresses, who often pose for cheerful cheesecake pinup shots. India's films are very popular in Afghanistan, and Bollywood, as India's Hindi-language movie industry is known, lost almost 10 percent of its total market when the Taliban closed the theaters. When a Kabul theater quickly reopened, mobs of men assembled to see the only print of a Bollywood extravaganza remaining in the country. Crowds grew so large that soldiers had to intervene. For those who couldn't get a ticket, a video store suddenly opened to offer such fare as *Gladiator, Police Story,* and *Independence Day.*

Other Afghans exhumed the TV sets they had buried in their yards to save them from the autos-da-fé of electronics the Taliban staged in Kabul's soccer stadium. A few Afghans examined the homemade satellite dishes—hammered out of old paint cans—that were arrayed in the streets. Those who didn't have TVs anymore ran out to see what they could get from sellers who had put their black market stocks of electronics on open display. The shoppers were looking for a boom box or for any machine that would help return pleasure to their lives.

In short, the first breath of cultural freedom that Afghans had enjoyed since 1995 was suffused with the stuff of commercially generated popular culture. The people seemed delighted to be able to look like they wanted to, listen to what they wanted to, watch what they wanted to, and generally enjoy themselves again. Who could complain about Afghans' filling their lives with pleasure after being coerced for years to adhere to a harshly enforced ascetic code?

The West's liberal, anti-materialist critics, that's who.

The High Culture Sputter

"How depressing was it," asked Anna Quindlen in a December *Newsweek* column, "to see Afghan citizens celebrating the end of tyranny by buying consumer electronics?" Apparently, if you're somebody like Quindlen—who confessed in the same column that "I have everything I could want, and then some"—the spectacle was pretty dispiriting. Liberty itself descends on the land, and the best thing its people can do is go shopping? It was just too vulgar.

Pulitzer Prize winner Quindlen had given voice to the Cultural Sputter of the *bien-pensant,* a well-known reaction afflicting people of taste forced to live in a world of vulgarities. It's an act with a very long pedigree. Eighteenth-century aristocrats by the palaceful were appalled when professional writers first appeared. Writing in exchange for money, they thought, would be the ruin of letters. John Ruskin, King of Victorian Sputterers, couldn't stand Rem-

brandt because the Dutch master's paintings lacked "dignity": All those paintings of self-satisfied, bulbous-nosed burghers made Ruskin gag.

The sputter is endlessly adaptable. A notorious space-age version choked Norman Mailer half to death. He was watching astronaut Alan B. Shepard walking on the moon in 1971, when Shepard suddenly took out a secretly stowed golf club and launched a drive at the lunar horizon. Mailer was spiritually mortified. Humankind should have been humbled, literally on its knees, as it entered the cathedral of the universe; instead it drove golf balls through its windows. What's the matter with people? Give them infinity, and they make it a fairway. Give them liberty, and they reach for a Lucky. Or they go *shopping*.

There are a lot of sputterers like Quindlen, and they too condemn the substance of Afghanistan's national liberation celebration. Why? Because they think that cultural consumerism—whether nascent as displayed in Kabul or full-blown as in the hedonist West—is the serpent in freedom's garden. When culture and commerce meet, they believe, both democracy and prosperity are poisoned. As for true culture, it hasn't got a chance.

Hence, when Hillary Clinton, then still the first lady, addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, a couple of years ago, she argued that "there is no doubt that we are creating a consumer-driven culture that promotes values and ethics that undermine both capitalism and democracy." In fact, she said, "I think you could argue that the kind of work ethic, postponement of gratification, and other attributes that are historically associated with capitalism are being undermined by consumer capitalism."

Leave aside the spectacle of making such a speech to some of the world's richest and most privileged people gathered in a highly exclusive Alpine resort. Clinton's message was actually a restatement of a well-known and highly regarded thesis. She'd lifted her text straight out of Daniel Bell's classic 1974 study *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Capitalism was built on an ethic of work and duty, Bell argued, but it yields a culture of self-involved pleasure that undermines the attitude necessary for disciplined achievement.

The man of the hour at this nexus of culture, democracy, and commerce, however, is Benjamin R. Barber, a political science professor now at the University of Maryland. As cultural darkness descended on the Afghans, Barber published a 400-page sputter called *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (1996). His argument was that tradition-bound, often blood-based anti-modernism ("Jihad") is one of two powerful forces in the world undermining true democracy. The other rogue force? "Unrestrained capitalism," especially of the sort displayed by aggressive, resource-depleting, soul-destroying multinational corporations ("McWorld"). Their encounter, he argued, would explode at the expense of the noble communitarian ideal of civil society. Barber's tome was illustrated with a striking image of a woman clad in a black burqa holding a can of Pepsi, the Western drink of "choice" throughout most of the Arab and Islamic world.

Barber's approach to this tangle of issues is in some ways the flip side of the school that derives from Daniel Bell. While Bell's group sees capitalism under threat from its own debased culture, Barber, drawing on the critique of the old Frankfort School of cultural Marxists, sees not only democracy but culture itself—in the grand sense—under siege by an inevitably debasing capitalism.

"McWorld," writes Barber, "is a product of popular culture driven by expansionist commerce. Its template is American, its form style. Its goods are as much images as materiel, an aesthetic as well as a product line. It is about culture as commodity, apparel as ideology." It is, in short, about the imposition of Americanized, commercial meaning on daily life, an act those Jihadists, who take their meaning from the transcendent, are bound to resist by any means necessary.

If one takes these complementary critiques as a set, one cannot escape an overpowering conclusion: The capitalist system is doomed, suicidal. In fact, it has been destroying itself since its appearance. These critics have isolated democracy, capitalism, and culture from one another, and have each of them surrounded by the others. Real democracy can't survive because it is choked by a capitalist "culture" driven by money and power; true culture can't survive because it is destroyed by capitalism's manufactured populism; capitalist prosperity can't survive because it is undermined by the anti-democratic forces of self-absorption that it unleashes.

In other words, whichever route one takes in this intellectual landscape, it descends into the same perdition. As for the Afghans, they're halfway to hell despite—or more precisely, because of—a national aftershave shortage.

Taste and Distaste

But wait. Barber has a solution to commercial damnation. Salvation, he has suggested, lies in good taste. Strangely enough, *his* good taste.

Jihad vs. McWorld made few ripples when it first

If you can imagine those Afghan video smugglers loading their mules with fewer copies of *Titanic* and more dubs of PBS programs, then you can imagine Western liberal critics being more optimistic about the prospects for Central Asian democracy.

appeared, but it found its readership in the wake of September 11, when it was reprinted in a large new edition. Despite its "Jihad" paradigm, and despite a cover featuring a veiled woman, Barber's book is only incidentally about Islam. Nevertheless, as the United States began its military assault against the Taliban regime, Barber was suddenly in great demand, offering audiences and interviewers a Big Picture analysis of what was going on in the world and what we should do about it.

One of the things we should do, Barber argued, is to stop defiling the world with the crass products of our cultural machine. Why should we stop? Because Barber thinks it's all "garbage."

"I mean, we don't even export the best of our *own* culture," he sputtered to *The Washington Post* in November, in the course of an admiring profile. Our cultural best, thinks Barber, is "defined by serious music, by jazz, by poetry, by our extraordinary literature, our playwrights—we export the worst, the most childish, the most base, the most trivial of our culture. And we call that American."

Of course, cultural artifacts and styles that are "base" and "trivial," according to Barber and others like him, are exactly what many Afghans longed for while under the Taliban heel and what they turned to the minute they had the chance. They wanted to adorn themselves according to fleeting style, to hear pop hits, to watch escapist movies. A lot of the things Afghans sought were American products, and those that weren't are recognizably based on commercial models developed in the United States (e.g., Bollywood movies). Afghans may have thought their troubles—at least those troubles involving small pleasures—were over. Barber explains why their troubles were only beginning.

By immersing themselves in such made-for-profit vulgarity, Barber argues, people—be they Afghans or any other benighted group—undermine any hope they might have of achieving a just, civil society. Instead they enslave themselves to the West's cultural marketers (or their Eastern imitators). Instead of pursuing a democratic civil ideal, people will waste their time and money on a poisonous bath of selfish consumerism. The Afghans were buying consumer electronics before the shooting stopped; tomorrow or the next day, they'll be manipulated into wearing $200 sneakers. If there's one thing that critics of consumerism know, it's that neither Afghans nor any other people "need" such things. The notion that there are consumerist "needs" is a founding capitalist delusion. As Barber puts it, consumer choice is a "charming fraud."

What, then, is the appropriate cultural path to democracy? Barber told the *Post* that if the U.S. must export culture it should at least export its "best." There's an obvious problem with the list Barber offers, since many of his examples of cultural quality—jazz, novels, Broadway theater—were themselves assailed as intolerably vulgar by contemporary critics who were disgusted at their appearance. But Barber surely realizes that, so we can assume he's getting at something else. He's singing in praise of culture that doesn't pander, of culture that teaches and leaves us thinking, of visionary art that lifts us morally and makes us better by challenging us. In short, he's a champion of what might be called contemplative art. That is not an art of commerce; it is an art of patronage, of enlightened taste. If you can imagine those Afghan video smugglers loading their mules with fewer copies of *Titanic* and more dubs of PBS programs, then you can imagine Western liberal critics being more optimistic about the prospects for Central Asian democracy.

Is Barber right? He is about one thing: The issue here is taste. But taste in this case has nothing at all to do with perceived *quality*. To approach it that way is to run an endless round of Hell's nine circles, only to arrive back at oneself. Thus Barber concludes that what the world should do now is attend his favorite plays.

What this taste debate is about is *meaning*, the meaning that style and artifacts have for those who seek them out and consume them. The reason many critics see the world devolving into vulgar chaos is that they see a world filled with artifacts, nearly all of them disposable, that have no meaning to them. It's all just "garbage": the "base," the "most trivial," the "worst." But what if these disposable artifacts actually do have meaning? Does the devolving

world suddenly look any different? Do democracy, capitalism, and culture still have each other surrounded?

As it happens, the 20th century conducted a series of real-life experiments on just this subject. At various times and in various places, commerce, culture, and freedom have been isolated from one another, while taste was allowed to compete with meaning. For those who lived through some of these experiments, the experience was one of extended misery. Indeed, for some, that misery continues. But the lessons are fascinating, and the West has yet to absorb them.

The Style of Anti-Stalinism

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union was confronted by a wave of Islamism in its Central Asian Republics; it was exactly the same phenomenon that was to break the Soviets in Afghanistan. Moscow thought it knew just how to combat it. It started beaming Western rock music in Islamism's direction, the idea being that sensual degeneracy (in Soviet terms) would undermine the appeal of religious transcendence. This is Benjamin R. Barber's thesis turned inside out, but for all that it may be its best example in real life. "McWorld" was really at war with "Jihad," though the forces of McWorld had been marshaled by the anti-capitalist Soviets against a Jihad supported militarily, at least in Afghanistan, by capitalist America. Who says communism lacked a sense of irony?

The Soviets' rock gambit didn't work. Why? Because you can't export meaning the way you can export anti-aircraft Stingers. To move culture, you need an array of tricky requirements, from willing early receivers to adapters who will transmute it into local terms (like the singer Ahmed Zaher) to diffusionists who will spread it. But even with all that in place, you're still not moving meaning. You can't export meaning *at all.*

By the 1980s, the people who should have understood these issues better than anyone were the Soviets themselves, because they had been on the receiving end of a cultural transfer that had largely undone them. The Soviets even should have known how and where meaning can arise in such a process.

In the USSR, it was low, disruptive culture that generated a "consumerist" demand for the artifacts that embodied its values as well as a popular demand for the freedom to engage in its activities. Because neither consumerism nor democratic freedoms existed in the country, shadow versions of both eventually developed. The entire process, from beginning to end, was founded on vulgarity. Here's what happened.

Some extraordinary and totally unexpected figures appeared on the streets of Moscow in 1949 and in other major cities of the Soviet Bloc soon afterward. They wore jackets with huge, padded shoulders and pants with narrow legs. They were clean-shaven, but they let their hair grow long, covered it with grease, and flipped it up at the back. They sported unusually colorful ties, which they let hang well below their belts. What their fellow Muscovites most noticed about them, for some reason, were their shoes, which were oversized, with thick soles. There were some women in the movement as well, notable for their short, tight skirts and very heavy lipstick.

Although they were Russians, they called each other by such names as "Bob" and "Joe." In Moscow, they referred to their hangout, Gorki Prospekt, as "Broadway." They chewed gum, they affected an odd walk that involved stretching their necks as they went down the street, and they loved to listen to American jazz.

These young men were to become known in Russian as *stilyagi*, a term that is usually translated as "style hunters"; their story has been told by a number of authors, including Artemy Troitsky, Timothy W. Ryback, and S. Frederick Starr. The stilyagi constitute one of the most remarkable movements in the rich history of oppositional subcultures. What they had turned themselves into were walking cultural protests against Stalinism in one of its most paranoid periods. All that Stalin had melted into air, the stilyagi made flesh.

In the years after World War II, Stalin attempted to extirpate every aspect of American culture from Soviet life. Jazz, which had been played publicly in the USSR as recently as the war years, was now officially regarded as decadent capitalist filth; to even speak of jazz during this period was a criminal act. The same was true of anything American: It was *all* capitalist decadence, and it was all dangerous and usually illegal. In reaction, the stilyagi did not merely embrace American culture in secret; they actually appropriated American characters ("Joe," "Bob"), as they understood them, and took them into public. Indeed, they borrowed American cultural geography ("Broadway") and laid it over Stalin's.

But what is most striking about the American personae assumed by the stilyagi was that these alternate personalities were built out of vulgarisms. Mind you, this was not vulgarity as only the insane Stalinist cultural apparatus would define it, but a strident, studied vulgarity that made even Western elites grimace when they saw it in their own streets. The stilyagi were zoot suiters, loud-tie-wear-

Soviet authorities tried everything to combat the rock music. They even instructed the gymnastic bureaucracy to invent "official" rock dances consistent with socialist values, which they then pushed on Soviet TV.

ing, gum-smacking, slang-using, greasy jazz-heads in need of haircuts. Their protest was not a matter of distributing banned poetry texts; it was a public act, complete with role names, costumes, and even a peculiar behavior that was intended to call attention to itself.

It wasn't only the authorities with whom the stilyagi had to contend; it was everyone. Being a stilyaga was truly isolating, and the public reaction was brutal. Their fellow Muscovites taunted them on the sidewalks and on the streetcars, loudly criticizing their appearance, hurling insults at them, sometimes attacking them. Obviously, the Communist press took notice of them, terming them subversive and linking them to criminal elements. Inevitably, the police also went after them. When the cops didn't arrest them, they gave the stilyagi impromptu street haircuts or, interestingly, slashed their clothes.

Improvising an Image

Where did the stilyagi get their look and behavior? They assembled their personae from the bits and pieces of low American culture to which they briefly had access. The men's hair, for example, came from Tarzan movies. Stalin had been quite taken by Tarzan and had previously allowed several Johnny Weismuller films into the country. Soviet critics, however, had afterward attacked the character as representing the savagery and base sexuality of the capitalist West. That was all the stilyagi had to hear. The gum chewing seems to have been borrowed from James Cagney movies that had been exhibited; as reputed celebrations of disorder and criminality, gangsterisms were naturally absorbed into the style. Other details were borrowed from disparate sources or simply made up.

But the truly impressive achievement of the stilyagi was in creating the material elements of their protest. Remember, this was the heart of Stalinist darkness: There were no marketers to exploit the stilyagi, no merchandising apparatus to lure them into the desire for false consumerist needs. Instead, the stilyagi had to manufacture almost everything themselves. Their artifacts were the expression of a preexisting meaning, of an opposition to the stifling repression of Stalinism. The stilyagi created their hair, clothing, and slang styles as a means of achieving the identities they were struggling to assume.

To do so, they were often brilliantly resourceful. Where did they get their loud ties, for example? They weren't going to find what they wanted in the state-run GUM department store near Red Square; there were no chains of tie shops. Instead, they took whatever ties they had and literally painted over them, or they cut ties from whatever appealing swath of fabric they might locate, whether it was in the black market or hanging over their windows as a curtain. (Prague's version of the stilyagi affixed pieces of American cigarette packaging to their self-made ties.)

Who did their hair? The style wasn't merely lengthy, recall; it was flipped. There were no stylists who would sell them a look; they had to do it themselves. Using heated rods, they styled one another's hair in their kitchens; old stilyagi would later remember walking around all the time with burns on their necks. Some stilyagi obtained the leather for their notorious shoes from the black market, too. They had to peg their own pants. They couldn't even locate genuine chewing gum, so they substituted paraffin wax.

But the crowning achievement lay in their music collections. Jazz survived in the Soviet Union in some astonishing circumstances. As jazz historian S. Frederick Starr has recounted, many of the country's best musicians were actually in Siberian prison camps, but these camps were in many cases ruled by commanders who liked jazz and who organized the musicians to play for their often-lavish parties. Prison camp commanders would even exchange these jazz groups, allowing them to "tour," as it were, camps where countless prisoners were being worked, starved, and frozen to death. Other bands were exiled to remote cities, such as Kazan in the Tartar region, where they were supposed to undergo "rehabilitation." Instead, these groups, many of which had learned jazz in pre-Mao Shanghai, took advantage of the local officials' musical ignorance, and played jazz anyway. In Kazan, the courageous bands even performed on Tartar State Radio. That's how the early stilyagi kept up with the music: by monitoring Tartar

broadcasts to hear exiled musicians outsmarting their cultural keepers.

But the stilyagi managed not only to hear jazz, but to assemble collections of recordings too. How? They had turntables, but they certainly couldn't buy jazz records in record stores (there weren't any). They couldn't tape what they heard on the radio. Even assuming they could get access to a reel-to-reel recorder, where were they going to get enough blank tape? The solution was a piece of genius. A jazz-loving medical student realized that he could inscribe sound grooves on the surface of a medium that was actually plentiful in the Soviet Union: old X-ray plates. He rigged a contraption that allowed him to produce "recordings" that, while obviously of low quality, at least contained the precious music and allowed its admirers to listen to it at will. He and his imitators were to make a lot of well-earned money on the black market.

The stilyagi were eventually transformed by a series of changes in their world. Stalin died in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev inaugurated the so-called cultural thaw in 1956. In the meantime, the Voice of America began transmitting jazz to the USSR via shortwave. The surviving prisoner-musicians of the USSR were still playing big band arrangements; they—along with their "audience"—had been completely isolated from the international music scene and had no idea what had been happening. Thanks to VOA jazz DJ Willis Conover, however, the Soviet Bloc started hearing bebop. Its expressive improvisation electrified the stilyagi and their scene started going cool.

In 1957 a stilyagi dream came true. Despite Khrushchev's complaint that jazz gave him gas, American jazz musicians came to Moscow to play at a festival. The stilyagi who showed up in their notorious costume finery, however, sensed the inconsistency between their self-presentation and the cool music they were embracing. It was a bittersweet moment. They went home, put away the loud ties, and started giving each other Gerry Mulligan crew cuts.

But the cultural problems for Soviet authorities were just beginning. Russian athletes had returned from the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, with something new: rock music. Built on the foundation prepared by the stilyagi, the Soviet Bloc rock subculture (complete with music on X-ray plates called "rock on ribs") was soon to become far, far bigger than the stilyagi scene had ever been. It was filled with innovations of its own, eventually adopting Western clothes, especially jeans. Entrepreneurs leased pictures of Western acts to fans for limited periods (remember, there were no publicly available Xerox machines under communism); exploited new technology, especially the cassette tape; and formed illegal bands that staged illegal concerts. Eventually, the Soviet Bloc rock scene grew into an alternate world, complete with a string of safe houses that one could use to inhabit the counterculture no matter where one went.

Soviet authorities tried everything to combat the rock subculture. They banned it, belittled it, and co-opted it with state-approved rock bands. They even instructed the gymnastic bureaucracy to invent "official" rock dances consistent with socialist values, which they then pushed on Soviet TV. Obviously, nothing worked, and nothing could have worked.

The point of the various musical countercultures under the Soviets was not simply to hear music. What the authorities never understood, and what many cultural critics in the West similarly don't understand, is that the fans who inhabit such "vulgar" and disruptive subcultures are not being exploited. It is the fans who are using both the music scene and the paraphernalia that surrounds it for their own expressive purposes. If there is no one to sell them the paraphernalia—the clothes, the imagery, the recordings—then the members of these subcultures will not go without it. They will create it themselves.

There was simply no way for the Soviet system to come to terms with this and remain true to its authoritarianism. In the end, it wasn't the musical subcultures that were delegitimized but Soviet authority. The inability of such a system to allow its citizens to construct their own cultural identities—that is, to meet their "consumer demands"—was a major factor in robbing communism of credibility among its own populations.

Rai Spell

Although the Soviets never understood how to use music to oppose Islamism, a segment of the Algerian populace did. Indeed, throughout the period that the USSR was vainly beaming Western pop at Central Asia's Islamists, Algerians were using their own music and their own cultural tradition in a struggle against North Africa's fundamentalists.

That struggle illustrates how broad-based culture, popular and vulgar, is far from being a mere distraction or a source of self-absorption. As Islamists have learned, it can function as a bulwark against coercion. More than that, it can even be a means of democratic resort. Here's how it worked in Algeria.

In 1994 a young man named Cheb Hasni was shot and killed outside the home he shared with his parents in the

Justice's medium is empathy, and empathy's medium is more often the melodrama than it is the manifesto. In short, the broad-based culture that emerges from markets frequently serves as a means of democratic self-correction.

Algerian port city of Oran. His crime? He was a singer of rai songs, an Algerian musical style that was as controversial as it was popular. Hasni was known as the "Prince of Rai" and had recorded more than 80 cassettes of the music. His murder is often perceived as the climax of the so-called war against rai being waged by Algeria's notoriously vicious Islamists. The religious zealots see rai music as the apotheosis of a secular culture they consider lewd and impious. But nobody really knows who killed Hasni. A conspiracist view of Hasni's death maintains that he was actually assassinated by the anti-Islamist military, who then blamed his death on religious militants so as to inflame further an already seething rai world.

This much is clear: By the time of Hasni's death, rai music was a major front in the confrontation between Algerian Islamism and the secular forces it sought to overcome. What is rai? The style is at least a century old and has deep folkloric roots, but it is the late, vulgarized form that is at issue. Rod Skilbeck, one of many academics who have studied it, asserts that in its modern form rai has developed into a kind of Algerian blues, "singing of alienation, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and forbidden sexual desires. Hedonism, existentialism, suffering, and total inaction became major structural elements." Despite the fact that it often serves as "background" music, its content has increasingly reflected the worldly, urban concerns of its listeners.

The "rai war" erupted in earnest in the wake of the 1990 elections, when Islamists came to power in many cities. Among their first acts was to close nightclubs, prohibit alcohol, and ban rai. Some Islamists would stone rai fans when they attempted to stage concerts. In 1991 fundamentalists tried to burn down a crowded hall during a performance. In 1994 a leading Berber singer was kidnapped by Islamists; he was reportedly "tried" on religious grounds and then released. After Hasni's murder that year, many rai singers emigrated to France.

For their part, rai singers would mix provocative, supposedly pornographic lyrics with openly anti-Islamist messages in their music, and some rai fans were drawn to the scene at least in part because of the secularist meaning they perceived in it. A famous rai anthem of 1988, "To Flee, But Where?," asks: "Where has youth gone?/Where are the brave ones?/The rich gorge themselves/The poor work themselves to death/The Islamic charlatans show their true face."

In the course of its confrontation with both governmental authority and the rising Islamist challenge, the rai world took on the characteristics of an oppositional subculture, reinforcing certain aspects of its participants' identities. At least some rai cultural statements were militantly anti-Islamist. For example, the 1997 film *100 Percent Arabica*, made in France by the Algerian writer and filmmaker Mahmoud Zemmouri, uses such leading rai stars as Khaled and Cheb Mami to portray the rai world as a culture of hope beset by mullahs who are revealed as criminal hypocrites.

The Islamist campaign to take over Algeria has not succeeded. The country's military eventually took control of the government with the apparent support of many secularists who feared that the alternative was an Islamic state on the model of Iran. Islamists have massacred tens of thousands of people in the ensuing civil war.

But if democratic values are stymied in the political sphere, they remain alive culturally. Algerian rai is a vulgar form by elite standards, one that addresses "low" subjects of sexual desire through a "base" model of popular celebrity. It is diffused by way of cheap and widely available consumer electronics and is a potential means for the gradual reordering of the society around the music.

Specifically, it is capable of giving voice to powerless outgroups, and of helping to redefine the position of women and changing the relationship of the sexes. Nor would such a gradualist revolution be peculiar to Algeria. British society began a similar reordering of social roles in the 18th century using similar means. In that case, the vulgar form at issue was popular, escapist fiction of the kind that critics feared would fill women's heads with all manner of bad desires. The United States experienced a similar process of change in the 19th century. Indeed, the revolutionary change in the

values of both societies was to pave the way for a series of historic humanitarian reforms.

In other words, the confluence of markets and culture has repeatedly advanced democratic values, because it has allowed a series of outgroups—women, blacks, Jews, gays, etc.—successfully to address the larger society about injustice and inequality. Such appeals have been successful precisely because of their "vulgar" forms. It is because they have involved such emotionally compelling forms as music and melodrama that they have induced their audiences to experience a given injustice through the eyes of those suffering from it. Justice's medium is empathy, and empathy's medium is more often the melodrama than it is the manifesto. In short, it is the broad-based culture that emerges from markets that frequently serves as a means of democratic self-correction.

Spice Grrls

Rai music has become a conduit for protest against the external world of authority and poverty. But it has also opened possibilities for other protests, including protest against its own world. For example, many rai songs address fantasies of illicit sex. In the tradition-bound, male-dominated world of North African societies, the women in such fantasies would be completely objectified types: women of pleasure whom one might encounter in a cabaret; women who dance, smoke, and drink alcohol. These are not prostitutes, but rather women who enjoy pleasure as a value in itself. The type, writes Danish academic Marc Schade-Poulsen, is known as a *maryula*.

In the course of rai's contemporary development, women singers have intervened in this male fantasy narrative. First, they have emerged as performers in their own right, building on the success of such Arab women singers as Asmahan and Umm Kulthum, two major Egyptian stars of earlier generations. As public celebrities, such singers provide new, assertive role models for women, in contrast to the low social status of traditional women performers. Second, they legitimize the content of their music as appropriate expressions for women.

Women rai singers do not only address love and personal happiness: Some of them have chosen to embody the personae of the female libertines that appear in male lyrics. These women perform under such professional names as Chaba "Zahouania," a word that Schade-Poulsen defines as "having the sense of being merry, joyous, fond of good living." The implication of this role playing is that the choice made by the maryula is legitimate: Women have a *right* to pleasure. If they have such a right, then the independence to make such a choice is a requirement. In other words, some women rai performers have used the very objectification of their role in the music to assert their right to independence.

This parallels closely what British and American women authors of escapist literature did with the concept of "virtue" in the 18th and 19th centuries. The rise of popular fiction featured the emergence of various fantasy adventures, especially the theme of "virtue in distress," in which a good and decent woman was threatened by a more powerful male villain. A series of women authors, notably the gothic specialist Ann Radcliffe, used this notion of womanly "virtue" to challenge the very idea of manly strength. As the women's-studies academic G. J. Barker-Benfield has noted, their argument was that if men too sought virtue, then they must attune themselves to what they professed to admire in feminine sensibilities. One of the results of their efforts was the emergence of the "man of feeling."

These women too were intervening in men's fantasies, turning the apparent weakness of their roles into a challenge that helped lead to moral recognition and, eventually, legal rights. Radcliffe was to intensify her argument by inventing the mechanics of suspense; she involved her readers emotionally in the fate of her virtuous characters. Radcliffe and her cohorts were overlooked in the literary histories; their lachrymose characters and creaking plots were not judged to have stood the "test of time." Yet the fact remains that they changed their time far more than did many of their more celebrated literary contemporaries.

Rai music has hardly resulted in egalitarian North African societies, but it is precisely this kind of force that will eventually facilitate social change. The potentially liberating forces that are new, by the way, are products of the market: diffusion via cheap technology. The dangerous idea that is being diffused—libertine eroticism—is not. It's been present in Islamic culture all along and is not a Western import.

In some ways, the rai scene appears to percolate with Westernisms. Ray-Ban sunglasses and backward-worn baseball caps (imported from Morocco and sold on the black market) are part of its costume. Although the music's roots are entirely Algerian, some of its modern instrumentation is obviously borrowed from Western influences. Rai owes its status as a pop form to the cassette tape recorder, and its current youth-oriented celebrity structure appears to follow a familiar model pioneered in the West.

There is a suggestion among defenders of Islamism and

Where did "grunge" come from? Did the flannel industry invent it because the lumberjack market was shrinking along with virgin-growth forests? What about Goth? Did some mascara factory accidentally make a batch too much?

critics of Western culture that surviving moral traditions are being undercut by commercial baseness. Both groups are making unhistorical arguments that severely distort the cultural reality. After all, libertinism has a long tradition in North Africa.

Rod Skilbeck cites an example of the kind of lyric that angers Islamists: "Oh my love, to gaze upon you is sin/It's you who makes me break my fast.../It's you who makes me 'eat' during Ramadan." The same artist, Rimitti (a woman more than 70 years old), adds, "People adore God, I adore beer." Not only are the lyrics impious, they subversively use sacred references to underscore their sexuality and advance their impiety.

Here's another text, one that actually addresses Satan, demanding that the devil restore a missing lover. If he doesn't, the singer makes the following threat: "I'll read the Koran! I'll start/a Koranic Night School for Adults!/I'll make the pilgrimage to Mecca every year/and accumulate so much virtue that I'll...I'll..." At that point, the lover is restored. "It was twice as good as before!" the singer exclaims, adding, "I've been on the best of terms/with the Father of Lies." The missing lover is identified by the male poet as "my boy."

The first text is recent; the second one, addressed to Satan and threatening Koranic virtue, is from the poet Abu Nuwas, who wrote erotic poetry to both men and women in the eighth century. Arabic poetry is extraordinarily rich, and one of its most striking strains involves the erotic in a context of religious skepticism. Even caliphs wrote erotic poetry. Indeed, there is a centuries-old tradition of Islamic poetry celebrating the pleasures of wine, sex, singing girls, and beardless young male cupbearers. While there have certainly been periods of ascendant religious piety, there is a good case that it is modern, censorious Islamist pietism that is the newer development in the Muslim world, and that the celebration of "vulgar" pleasures predates it.

If the Hush Puppies Fit

Speaking of those reversed baseball caps worn by rai's fans, why did so many people in the West start wearing them that way in the first place? Was there an ad campaign of some kind that set the model? Was it part of a vast corporate strategy to instill a pointless "need" in stupid Western consumers and subsequently sell a lot of hats? What about those notorious, logo-heavy athletic shoes? People don't really "need" those, do they? Where did "grunge" come from? Did the flannel industry invent it because the lumberjack market was shrinking along with virgin-growth forests? What about Goth? Did some mascara factory accidentally make a batch too much and invent Goth to sell the overstock? How are such phenomena born, anyway?

Capitalism's critics in the West blame what they call "the culture industry," which makes itself rich by aggressively manipulating consumerist idiots. The latter part with their money because they have been persuaded that some truly useless but expensive object will make them hip, youthful, or desirable, or raise their status. This manipulative scheme is now a global enterprise, filling the world with what Benjamin Barber and his ilk castigate as "junk." Worse, say the Daniel Bells and Hillary Clintons, it's a *threat* to Western prosperity, because it instills self-absorption at the expense of the work ethic.

This critique completely misses the point of cultural commerce. The citizens of the post-subsistence world have a historically remarkable luxury: They can experiment with who they are. They can fashion and refashion their identities, and through much of their lives that is just what they do. They can go about this in a lot of ways, but one of the most important methods is what is known and reviled as "consumerism." They experiment with different modes of self-presentation, assert or mask aspects of their individuality, join or leave a series of subcultures, or oppose and adhere to centers of power. It is from this complex mix that the things of the material world become the furnishings of both a social and a personal identity. That's what meaning is.

Consumerism of this sort has been born and reborn many times. The extended and apparently open-ended chapter in which the Western world has been wallowing began in 17th-century Britain, Holland, and other European

trade centers. It is still being reborn all over the world, as people grab the first opportunity to escape the traditionalist boundaries of selfhood. Yet this is the very spectacle that depresses the West's anti-consumerist critics and makes them sputter.

Far from being a drain on prosperity, the drive to create and recreate identity has proven irresistible, even in circumstances where no cultural industry exists. Where such industries do exist, self-fashioning immediately becomes an engine of the economy. As British scholars John Golby and William Purdue observed in their 1984 study of the origins of industrialist popular culture, the key factor in the increasingly positive attitude toward work in the 18th century was neither religion nor legislation but "the growth of new patterns of leisure and consumption," primed by wage increases. Generally speaking, workers didn't start punching the clock because they were forced to but because they wanted to. Regular hours—and regular wages—gave them more time and money to buy and enjoy the crass, vulgar, and base artifacts from which they fashioned their senses of self. In other words, the evidence from the beginning has been that culture, capitalism, and democracy actually reinforce one another.

The opportunity to create and revise one's identity is by its nature an anti-authoritarian enterprise, and that is nowhere more obviously demonstrated than in the reviled Western cult of "cool." Successful culture industries don't try to manipulate their customers; they long ago learned that they cannot imbue their products with meaning. Rather, they attempt to engage in "meaning" intelligence, spending vast amounts to identify rapidly changing meanings; meanings they know will change yet again the moment that the same public catches the first whiff of marketing. In other words, the most successful among the cultural industrialists are not leading their customers at all; that isn't possible. The best they can do is try to *follow* them.

The best description of this process is a 1997 *New Yorker* essay by Malcolm Gladwell called "The Coolhunt." Gladwell describes a telling cultural moment involving the makers of Hush Puppies shoes. A few years ago, nobody wanted the suede shoes except a dwindling number of older customers. They'd become passé. Even the manufacturers wanted to drop the old line of "Dukes" and "Columbias" and get into so-called "aspirational shoes." The company wanted to introduce something called the "Mall Walker."

"But then something strange started happening," writes Gladwell. "Two Hush Puppies executives...were doing a fashion shoot for their Mall Walkers and ran into a creative consultant from Manhattan named Jeffrey Miller, who informed them that the Dukes and the Columbias weren't dead, they were dead chic." People in Manhattan were scouring thrift stores for them; Hush Puppies were turning up in hip fashion shoots. Hush Puppies executives were as mystified as they were pleased. They were the beneficiaries of a process over which the market has no control: They'd become cool.

The best that the West's cultural industrialists can hope for, as Gladwell argues, is a well-timed intervention in cool. They can try to associate a product with a (temporarily) cool celebrity; they can pay to "place" their product in a film that they hope will be cool, they can try to subordinate their product to a currently cool subculture, as Sprite has done with rap music. Sometimes they succeed, but even when they do, their process begins again the next day.

More frequently, these efforts do not succeed at all, and for the same reason that Soviet teenagers rejected "official" socialist dances, and that Central Asian listeners rejected the Western music beamed at them from Moscow: Culture is built around meaning, and meaning proceeds from one's self.

Cultural Exchange

From mid-century to communism's end, the Soviet Bloc and the United States engaged in an official exchange of contemplative art forms. The U.S. actually sent its "best" abroad, exactly as Benjamin Barber wishes it would do today.

The process was largely a charade. Not that the material being exchanged wasn't good—it was often very good—but it was unrepresentative of what was going on in either country. Still, the arrangement was a good deal for the Soviets. They had under their control many extremely talented poets, filmmakers, dancers, and musicians and—in contrast to the vulgar, commercialized West—they were thus able to position themselves as enlightened patrons of the fine arts, in the best European aristocratic tradition.

The U.S., for its part, counted it as a victory when a member of the Bolshoi would hop an airport turnstile and defect. When some American would actually beat the Russians in an elitist competition—concert pianist Van Cliburn, chess master Bobby Fischer—Americans would celebrate them as national heroes. It never occurred to the West that the Soviet system was, in the meantime, being undone by the likes of Paul Anka (much more popular among Soviet fans than was Elvis, whom they simply never understood). Anyone who would have tried to make such a case would

In less than two decades, the menacing hoods of *Blackboard Jungle* became the lovable leads in *Grease*. By then, however, that same generation had become, in its turn, concerned about the disruptive social effects of rap music.

have been dismissed as simply not serious.

The West has never been comfortable with its own cultural vulgarity. Such anxiety is arguably strongest in the United States, which has long nursed a cultural inferiority complex vis-à-vis more-established British and European practitioners of high art. Popular, commercial forms are not thoughtful. Rather, they are temporary, noisy, intense, ecstatic. They are sensual and disruptive. Because they are frequently set in motion by powerless and even despised outgroups, they appear subversive. They not only threaten social morals, but challenge established power relationships. The result is that such ecstatic forms are attacked not only by the West's left-liberal critics for their commercial origin, but by the West's conservatives for their disruptive power. Cultural ecstasy may have billions of participants, but it hardly has a single friend.

For the last 200 years, vulgar forms and subcultures have often set off a series of "moral panics" among those who perceive a threat to their own cultural power and status. The popular novel, when it first appeared, set one off. So did penny dreadfuls and pulps. So did melodramatic theater. So did the music hall. So did the tabloid press, and the waltz, and ragtime, and jazz, and radio, movies, comic books, rock music, television, rap, and computer games.

All of these—and more—led contemporary critics to declare the end of civility, to worry over some newly identified form of supposed "addiction" (to novels, to TV, to video games, to pornography, to the Internet, to Pokémon, etc.), to announce that the coming generation was "desensitized," and to rail about childishness and triviality. It's the cultural sputter that never ends.

In democratic societies, most such panics simply run their course until the media tire of them. (Drug prohibition remains a singular exception.) Thus, the generation that in the 1950s was dismissed as Elvis-loving, hot-rod-building, gum-chewing, hog-riding, leather-wearing, juvenile-delinquent barbarians eventually achieved a mature respectability in which the artifacts of their vulgarity became sought-after nostalgia, and even a beloved part of the common cultural heritage. In less than two decades, the menacing hoods of *Blackboard Jungle* became the lovable leads in *Grease*. By then, however, that same generation had become, in its turn, concerned about the disruptive social effects of rap music and violent electronic gaming.

In places where the moral order is the legal order, however, ecstatic forms and assertive ways of being remain matters for the police. In December, Cambodia's prime minister ordered tanks to raze the country's karaoke parlors. Last fall, Iran announced a new campaign against Western pop music and other "signs and symbols of depravity." And only last summer, the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan—just a few hundred miles north of Afghanistan—began a crackdown on dangerous "bohemian" lifestyles. The authorities went after a number of familiar outsiders —gays, religious dissidents—but even Westerners were surprised to learn that one targeted group was "Tolkienists." It turns out that there are Kazakh Hobbit wannabes who like to dress up in character costume and re-enact scenes from J.R.R. Tolkien's novels. For their trouble, they were being subjected to sustained water torture.

Hobbit re-enactors in Kazakhstan? Where do they get their paraphernalia? Are there Kazakh Tolkienist fanzines? Have fans started changing Tolkien's narratives to suit themselves, the way Western *Star Trek* subcultures turned their own obsession into soft-core pornography? Do re-enactors change roles from time to time, or are any of them trapped inside a Frodo persona? Is there no end to the identities waiting to be assumed? No end to what invention makes flesh, before it tosses it aside and starts again? ◻

Charles Paul Freund (cpf@reason.com) is a **reason** *senior editor.*

...stena after September 11.

...esse Walker

On October 7, some police officers in Maryland decided that two trucks on Interstate 270 might be carrying explosives. The alert cops blocked traffic for an hour, searching the vehicles for tools of terror. On examination, the cargo turned out to be stage equipment bound for a memorial service for the firefighters killed on September 11.

A forgivable mistake, given the circumstances? Perhaps.

In Tyler, Texas, a few days earlier, federal agents, city police, and bomb experts from far-flung cities descended on one family's mailbox to grapple with what the local *Morning Telegraph* described as a "crudely fashioned gadget, which was pieced together with batteries and green duct tape." The streets were blocked; the neighbors were evacuated. The device turned out to be an 8-year-old's homemade

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Still forgivable? Maybe—though on reflection, it doesn't seem likely that the killers who organized the World Trade Center attack would select a neighborhood in East Texas as their next target. But why, after learning that the purported bomb was actually a jerry-rigged flashlight, did the authorities still feel the need to confiscate it?

Since September 11, and especially since the anthrax outbreaks that followed, the news has been filled with bomb scares, germ scares, and nervous airlines. Baltimore-Washington International Airport shut down an entire concourse when someone mistook some powdered coffee creamer for anthrax spores; it later shut down a hallway for fear of what proved to be Sheetrock dust. In Nevada, a man called in the police after receiving a suspiciously lumpy package that, when opened, turned out to contain a pair of lace panties and a love letter. An airline bound for Los Angeles was diverted to Shreveport when a man handed a stewardess a note she described as "bizarre" but not actually threatening. ("It didn't make a lot of sense," she said, "but at the same time it was alarming.") Another flight was diverted on its way to New Jersey when some passengers aroused suspicion by speaking a foreign language in the back of the plane. A thorough investigation revealed that the men were two Jews praying.

It's a cautious time, and some of these incidents seem ridiculous only in retrospect. Others simply shouldn't have happened at all. Even the most sympathetic observer will have a hard time defending the airport guards in Philadelphia who nabbed Neil Godfrey before the 22-year-old could board his flight to Phoenix. According to Gwen Shaffer's report in the *Philadelphia City Paper*, a National Guardsman's suspicions had been aroused because Godfrey was reading a novel—Edward Abbey's *Hayduke Lives!*—whose cover illustration included some dynamite. United Airlines refused to let Godfrey board his plane, then barred him again when he tried to take a second flight.

Don't assume that such behavior has been limited to the United States. On October 29, the writer Tariq Ali was temporarily detained at Munich Airport when someone noticed he was carrying a volume titled *On Suicide*. The guard's pique turned to panic when he saw that the book had been written by Karl Marx.

Social Panic

At such moments, *panic* is indeed the appropriate word: a crushing, contagious fear that prompts people to behave hysterically. The issue isn't whether we're right to be afraid. It's whether we're responding rationally to our perfectly justified fear. The 9/11 attacks go so far beyond even their closest precedents that they leave us unsure how to distinguish real threats from the jitters.

The question becomes more pressing when you consider the social dimension of panic. Academics have long discussed the idea of the *moral panic*, in which fear and hysteria are magnified and distorted—perhaps even created—by social institutions. Though he didn't coin the phrase, the sociologist Stanley Cohen was the first to use it systematically, laying out the requirements for a moral panic in 1972: "A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then dis-

In Nevada, a man called in the police after receiving a suspiciously lumpy package that, when opened, turned out to contain a pair of lace panties and a love letter.

appears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible." To illustrate the model, Cohen examined the British uproar over two teen subcultures of the early 1960s, the rockers and the mods, and their sometimes violent rivalry. In the popular press, Cohen notes, seaside towns were being destroyed by warring gangs, with property getting trashed willy-nilly and pitched battles being fought in the street. But the kids had actually stuck to insults and minor vandalism until the press trumpeted its distorted account, inspiring an intense public concern, an increased police presence, and, ironically, a new willingness among the objects of the panic to behave the way they'd been described.

The concept of moral panic has since been extended by many other writers—at times, arguably, to the breaking point. Typically, sociologists have written about panics in which the purported threat was overblown (as with the rockers and mods) or entirely imaginary (as with the mythical Satanic child abuse rings of the late '80s and early '90s). Terrorism, by contrast, is clearly a real risk, and to some that in itself is enough to dismiss any talk of moral panic. "I certainly do not see the classic signs of panic, which chiefly involve *disproportionate* fear," says Philip Jenkins, a Penn State historian who has written about a variety of exaggerated social threats, from designer drugs to cult crime to clerical pedophiles. "As yet, we may not be as frightened as we should be."

Joel Best strikes a similar note. Best is a sociologist at the University of Delaware; like Jenkins, he has written often about moral panics. His 1999 book *Random Violence* notes that, contrary to social anxieties, violent crime does not threaten everyone equally but instead follows distinct patterns. You can't say that about the crimes of September 11. "Part of what's so mind-bendingly horrifying about the attack is that it comes out of nowhere," Best observes. "Obviously, the buildings that were struck were not picked at random, but whether you lived or died was a matter of luck. Nobody went to work that day with the thought that an airliner might be driven into the building." Some of the fears to emerge since then have been silly, Best concedes ("There's a tendency for people to say, 'First the World Trade Center, then the Pentagon, now something near me'"), but "if you're looking for signs of panic, I don't think it's in the public or the government. It's in the breathless 24-hour coverage. It's a big story, but on a slow day there's a tendency to spin out the implications."

Erich Goode, a sociologist at the University of Maryland and co-author of the 1994 book *Moral Panics*, is less sure. "There are certainly some features of this fear and concern that are very much like a classic case of a moral panic," he argues. One is the process of sensitization—in Goode's words, "seizing on small threats from the putative agent supposedly responsible for the danger and exaggerating them into major threats, to the point where even imaginary agents become threatening." For Goode, the bioweapon scare fits the bill. "Thousands upon thousands of reports of presumed anthrax sightings have flooded hospitals, 911, officials, etc., nearly all of them bogus...even guacamole and talcum powder have been candidates."

Another essential feature of a moral panic is a folk devil, which Goode defines as "an evil agent responsible for the threatening condition"—not the actual evil agents who did the deed, mind you, but a convenient scapegoat that can represent them. "There is the widespread feeling," Goode comments, "that Muslims/Arabs/Middle Easterners/people who 'are not like us' are responsible and should be punished." The initial wave of assaults on turban-wearing immigrants "seems to have died down"—and wasn't anywhere near as large as similar spurts of racial violence in the past—but the police aren't necessarily following suit. "We see a substantial number of suspects being detained on the basis of one or another supposed connection to the attack, but many of these detainees are far from suspicious," Goode notes. "One died in custody, and he had no connection whatsoever to the terrorists."

Still, when it comes to disproportionality, Goode becomes ambivalent. On the question of whether our fears are exaggerated, he says he's "not convinced one way or the other," but he has no doubt that the threat is both real and significant. "What's the likelihood that another attack will occur, even a major one?" he asks. "Substantial, almost certain."

Legal Residue

The most important parallel between the current scare and a moral panic may be the loosest. Some panics dissolve quickly, leaving no institutional legacy. But others are frozen into law, even if the initial fears that inspired them

quickly fade. Even minor panics can leave a legal imprint. The late-'80s frenzy over freeway shootings, in which a small handful of unrelated incidents were mistaken for an emerging trend, faded quickly when the *Road Warrior*–style bloodbath failed to arrive. Even so, California passed three freeway violence bills, ranging from a mild measure beefing up the highway patrol to a law adding five years to convicted freeway shooters' sentences.

For a more substantial example, consider the media-fueled fears that have preceded virtually every drug prohibition. In particular, consider the reaction to LSD in the 1960s, an affair that Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, writing in *Moral Panics*, describe as a "truly remarkable" hysteria. "Of all the widely used recreational drugs," they note, acid "is the one taken by users most episodically and occasionally, least regularly and chronically." Furthermore, the panic coincided with "an extremely low level" of LSD use, with the hysteria actually fading as the drug's popularity increased. The dangers of LSD were as exaggerated as its prevalence: At various times, it was alleged to cause chromosome damage, to produce birth defects, and, in one famous tale, to convince teenagers it was safe to stare directly into the sun. All of these claims were later discredited.

The LSD hysteria clearly fits Cohen's requirements for a moral panic. The drug was definitely defined as a threat to social values, and the mass media undeniably presented its moderate risks in "a stylized and stereotyped fashion." Goode and Ben-Yehuda note that '60s press accounts of LSD identified it with "psychic terror, uncontrollable impulses, violence, an unconcern for one's own safety, psychotic episodes, delusions, and hallucinations." (It was also associated, of course, with the hippie subculture, regarded in many quarters as a threat in itself.) The moral barricades were manned (the chairman of a New Jersey commission declared acid "the greatest threat facing the country today"), and accredited experts proposed several solutions to the alleged crisis, one of which was to prohibit the drug. LSD was outlawed in 1966, and it remains verboten in 2002, even though—again following Cohen's template—the panic rapidly deteriorated, to the point where there is no particular social concern about LSD today except to the extent that it is part of the larger drug war.

Violent crime, too, has inspired several panics, with public worries suddenly focusing on a threat that is relatively rare (such as serial murder) or a weapon that criminals rarely use (such as the guns carelessly lumped together as "assault weapons"). The first group of fears has inspired many laws; from the 1930s to the '50s, for example, many states passed "sexual psychopath" legislation. As the criminologist Edwin Sutherland noted at the time, there was no correlation between which jurisdictions rushed such bills into law and which jurisdictions saw an actual increase in such crimes. More recently, it's doubtful that carjacking would be a federal offense were it not for the exaggerated attention it received in the early '90s.

The second group of fears, of course, has unleashed several waves of arbitrary gun control legislation. Assault weapon laws, for example, did not prohibit guns based on their destructive power; comparably powerful weapons remained legal. Nor did they ban models that were misused especially frequently; the affected guns actually accounted for less than half a percent of American homicides and an even smaller percentage of all gun crimes. They were banned because they looked scary.

Even when no new legislation is passed, social hysteria can leave a lasting legal residue.

Spores and errant airplanes may haunt the average American, but that doesn't mean he's panicking. For true hysterics, you have to look to the political class.

During the panic over ritual child abuse, scores of men and women were convicted for their alleged roles in obviously fanciful conspiracies, usually on the basis of no more than the coached testimony of easily suggestible preschoolers. Many remain in jail today. Gerald Amirault, for example, is still serving a 30-to-40-year sentence for purportedly molesting dozens of children at Fells Acre Day School in Malden, Massachusetts, despite a complete absence of corroborating physical evidence for the often bizarre allegations. (Among other odd elements, the children's charges featured robots, magic wands, and a "bad clown" in a "magic room.")

Consolidating Power

Just like these earlier panics, the atrocities of September 11 have inspired many extensions in the scope and power of government, at least some of which will surely remain in effect long after the crisis has passed. We have already seen the birth of a new bureaucracy, the Office of Homeland Security, charged with protecting the home front against terrorists. There have been radical changes in the regulation of air travel, from a newly federalized security system to tighter restrictions on what items can be brought onto a plane. And then there's the hefty "USA PATRIOT Act"—an Orwellian law deserves an Orwellian name—which, among many other things, permits secret searches and warrantless Internet surveillance, allows authorities to hold foreign nationals without trial, gives police access to accused terrorists' phone records (again without a warrant), requires retailers to report "suspicious" customer transactions to the Treasury Department, and expands the definition of *terrorist* to include such nonlethal acts as computer hacking. In mid-November, President Bush took this expansion of executive power a step further, declaring unilaterally that accused terrorists can be tried in secret by special military tribunals.

Further encroachments on civil liberties have been proposed and may yet pass, from a national ID card to legalized torture. Other changes have been made without any formal legislation. As Goode notes, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has interned over 1,000 Arab and Muslim immigrants, most on minor charges that ordinarily would have been followed by a quick release on bond. The vast majority are not suspects, and no evidence ties them to the terror network: The police are on a fishing expedition, and they're the unfortunate fish. No law was officially changed to allow this, but by exercising their powers in this way, the authorities may have set a far-reaching precedent.

An awful lot of the new and proposed "security" measures will do little or nothing to improve Americans' security. It's now clear, for example, that intelligence agencies received several scattered signals of the impending attacks. Their failure to foresee the atrocities seems to have stemmed not from limits on their surveillance powers but from dysfunctional bureaucratic relations that kept them from connecting the data into a coherent picture. Nor is there good reason to believe that a federal airport security force will be more competent than the private guards formerly in place. What's important is the security incentives the airports face, not whether the people hired to stand guard are public employees.

Why were so many measures passed with so little thought? Because of the intense climate of fear, and the widespread feeling that *something* must be done to protect us from terrorists. If there were an encouraging number of warnings after 9/11 that civil liberties must be preserved and immigrants spared from racist assaults, there was also far more room for ideas that would have sparked shock or laughter just a week before. On the relatively mild side of the spectrum, there was the historian David McCullough's declaration that "it's not good to say, 'That's against the Bill of Rights, that's a violation of the Constitution.' We have to be realistic, we have to be responsible." More frantic were the erstwhile civil libertarian Alan Dershowitz, who suggested that judges should issue "torture warrants" when suspected terrorists are captured, and columnist Andrew Sullivan, who infamously commented that "the decadent left in its enclaves on the coasts...may well mount a fifth column." Even *Media Whores Online* derided the latter remark as "McCarthyist." (For those unfamiliar with the *Media Whores* site, this is a bit like being redbaited by Lillian Hellman.)

At times like this, actual effectiveness may not be the first thing on every decision maker's mind. It takes time, and a certain amount of creativity, to make effective changes in airport security; meanwhile, the government and the airlines still have to go through the motions of doing something about the threat. So they toss on useless regulations,

presumably on the theory that the illusion of security will be reassuring, and that rules that are especially intrusive and rigid—that is, more noticeable—will heighten the illusion. This isn't protection; it's a protective ritual.

Whether or not this is a panic, it's certainly a stampede. The USA PATRIOT Act was rushed blindly into law, with legislators voting for it without even reading it. Rep. Ron Paul, the libertarian Republican from Texas, told *Insight* that "the bill wasn't printed before the vote—at least I couldn't get it. They played all kinds of games, kept the House in session all night, and it was a very complicated bill. Maybe a handful of staffers actually read it, but the bill definitely was not available to members before the vote."

Defending Ourselves

For all that, we aren't necessarily in a moral panic. Set aside the government for a moment, and instead consider the governed. I began this essay with a litany of goofy responses to the terrorist threat. But it's a big country, and people do dumb things in it every day. That doesn't mean they're typical. "I think that people have tried to deal with this in a relatively calm, relatively professional way," argues Best. "I don't like the word *panic*—it implies irrational emotionalism. Think of the vast number of people who successfully evacuated the World Trade Center. Clearly, they didn't panic."

What's more, just as many apparent threats have turned out to be harmless, much behavior that initially appears to be hysterical might, on closer examination, prove rational. Such myopia has dogged some moral panic theorists, most notably the Marxist sociologist Stuart Hall. Hall's analysis of mugging in 1970s Britain held that the ruling class had conjured a panic over street crime to distract the masses from economic woes. His critics point out that muggings really did increase in the period in question, and that the uptick in public concern was therefore more sensible than Hall supposed.

Similarly, some observers have looked askance at Americans for suddenly stocking up on gas masks, learning martial arts, searching for Cipro to ward off anthrax, and rushing to practice at the shooting range. Writing about how anxieties were "getting the better of many of us," a reporter for the *Orange Country Register* dismissively declared, "It's gone far beyond the buying of gas masks and the hoarding of bottled water. Now people are buying guns. They're wearing surgical gloves and scrubbing their hands after handling mail. They're canceling trips, avoiding bridges, venturing to malls only in pairs. They're mobilizing to shut down the San Onofre nuclear power plant, plotting escape routes in case it blows, pinpointing family meeting places in the event of catastrophe." Similar pieces, each with its own local spin, have appeared in other cities across the country, from Fort Worth to New York.

But do such precautions really represent an overactive anxiety? Or does it make more sense to regard them as an inchoate, spontaneous movement toward civil defense, with citizens acting to protect themselves after the institutions that are supposed to protect us failed? Chances are, we'd be a lot safer if those institutions would do less to move power toward the center (by, say, setting up secret military tribunals) and more to facilitate our ability to defend ourselves (by, say, expediting Food and Drug Administration approval of other anthrax treatments).

In any event, preparing for the worst hardly belongs in the same category as social scapegoating or rushing ill-considered bills into law. Spores and errant airplanes may haunt the average American, but that doesn't mean he's panicking. For true hysterics, you have to look to the political class. Unfortunately, we may be stuck with the consequences of their hysteria for a long time to come.

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reason *Associate Editor Jesse Walker (jwalker@reason.com) is the author of Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America (NYU Press).*

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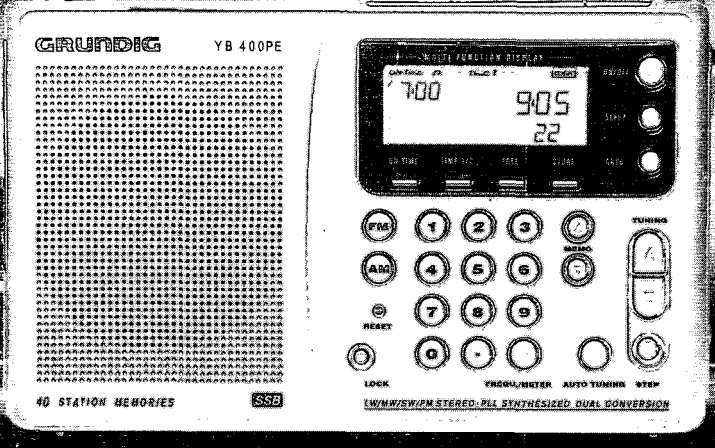

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OPPONENTS OF LIBERAL, market-oriented economic reform are fond of declaring that theirs is the cause of "social cohesion." First among globalization's many sins, they claim, is that it frays the bonds that hold communities together. Globalization destroys the connections that lift us above our narrower interests and embrace us all, rich and poor alike, in a greater whole. The frenzy of unchecked competition, the argument goes, has set one group against another while leaving the neediest and most vulnerable to fend for themselves.

There is nothing new about such attitudes. The belief that market competition alienates and atomizes was never expressed with more passionate ferocity than in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*. Only two years after England repealed its protectionist Corn Laws and embraced full-fledged free trade, Marx was already proclaiming the socially corrosive effects of nascent globalization:

"The bourgeoisie...has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egoistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade."

How does such thinking fit into today's historical context, now that Marx's dreamed-of future has come and gone? For a century, the collectivist, centralizing impulse worked to shape the goals and instruments of social policy. Now much of that work is coming into question. For partisans of social cohesion, the shoe is now on the other foot: Where once they fought in the name of alluring, untested possibilities, today they must defend existing and increasingly dilapidated structures from criticism and reform. They have transformed themselves from reformers and revolutionaries into conservatives and reactionaries.

The rearguard defense can be seen vividly in the fight over the centerpiece of the 20th century welfare state's

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attempts to centrally manage in the name of social cohesion: traditional social insurance programs. It is increasingly apparent that such policies are doomed to collapse and need fundamental rethinking. Blind resistance to that rethinking will only further rend the social fabric.

Behind the appealing rhetoric of unity, the contemporary anti-liberal agenda is deeply divisive: It pits the privileged beneficiaries of current policies against their more numerous but less visible victims. It sets current pensioners against the young and middle-aged whose hopes for retirement security are imperiled by the defects of current pension systems.

Critics of globalization argue that the spread of markets is undermining social cohesion by compromising national governments' ability to tax (and thereby fund) the social safety net. "The increasing mobility of capital has rendered an important segment of the tax base footloose, leaving governments with the unappetizing option of increasing tax rates disproportionately on labor income," according to Harvard University economist Dani Rodrik in *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?* (1997). "Yet the need for social insurance for the vast majority of the population that remains internationally immobile has not diminished. If anything, this need has become greater as a consequence of increased integration."

It is difficult even to take seriously the proposition that, whether because of globalization or otherwise, the governments of industrialized countries are hurting for tax revenue. Between 1965 and 1998, while globalization was supposedly eroding rich countries' tax bases, average total tax revenues as a percentage of GDP rose for Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries from just over 25 percent to well over 35 percent. There is, in short, no evidence whatsoever that national governments lack the resources to fund appropriate social policies.

Meanwhile, the notion that globalization has increased the need for social insurance does not square with the facts. The theory behind the notion is that international integration increases the risk of dislocation (and thus the need for the safety net) in those sectors of the economy exposed to international competition. But the majority of social spending goes to senior citizens who are retired from the work force; their exposure to the slings and arrows of foreign competition is nil.

It is undeniably the case that the welfare states of the advanced countries are now under severe fiscal strain. But if market forces are not the culprit, what is? The social safety net has been badly frayed, not by any pressures of globalization, but by the collectivized, top-down nature of traditional social insurance. At the heart of the problem are enormous, monolithic public pension systems that violate the most basic precepts of actuarial soundness. Those systems are primarily responsible for the welfare state's mounting financial woes.

Roots of Dependence

The founding father of collectivized social insurance, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, was brutally candid about the political benefits of centralization. As ambassador to Paris in 1861, he had seen how Napoleon III used state pensions to buy support for the regime. "I have lived in France long enough to know that the faithfulness of most of the French to their government...is largely connected with the fact that most of the French receive a state pension," he recalled later. For Bismarck, the appeal of social insurance was that it bred dependency on, and consequently allegiance to, the state.

Social insurance was thus born of contemptuous disregard for liberal principles: What mattered was not the well-being of the workers but the well-being of the state. With that animating principle, social insurance necessarily assumed a collectivist character. In particular, it would clearly not do simply to compel workers to provide for their own retirement; funded pensions that actually belonged to the workers would not inspire the proper feelings of dependency and subservience. Far better was the "pay as you go" system in which the government would transfer funds directly from current taxpayers to current retirees.

When such ventures are attempted in the private sector,

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they go by the name of pyramid or Ponzi schemes and constitute criminal fraud. The essence of a pyramid scheme is that investors' money is never put to productive use; it is simply diverted to pay off earlier investors. As long as new victims can be found, everything seems to work fine. Eventually, though, the promoters of the scheme run out of new investors, and the whole house of cards collapses.

Pay-as-you-go public pension systems operate in precisely the same way. As long as the contributions of active workers are sufficient to cover payments to current retirees, the system is fiscally healthy. Indeed, in the early decades of such programs, it appeared that the market had been outfoxed. Consider Nobel Prize–winning economist Paul Samuelson's smug optimism back in 1967: "The beauty of social insurance is that it is actuarially unsound. Everyone who reaches retirement age is given benefit privileges that far exceed anything he has paid in....How is this possible? It stems from the fact that the national product is growing at compound interest....Always there are more youths than old folks in a growing population....A growing nation is the greatest Ponzi game ever contrived."

Sooner or later, though, such hubris must receive its grim comeuppance. Shifting demographics impose the ultimate constraint. As populations age, the number of retirees begins to grow faster than the number of new workers, until at last the burden is unsustainable.

Meanwhile, the perverse incentive structure of collectivized social insurance works to accelerate the system's ultimate breakdown. In particular, workers have strong incentives to minimize or evade their contributions to the system, while retirees have an obvious stake in campaigning for higher benefits. Such dynamics steadily worsen the relationship between revenues and obligations and thereby hasten the eventual day of reckoning.

Today, with a global pension crisis that affects rich, developing, and postcommunist nations alike, the reckoning is at hand. Around the world, the ratio of active workers to retirees is shrinking. Promised benefits have spiraled out of control, while demographic changes and widespread evasion reduce the relative size of the contribution base. Consequently, the hopes for retirement security of hundreds of millions of workers are now in serious jeopardy.

The inevitable Ponzi endgame is now obvious in the rich countries of the industrialized world. In the United States, for example, average life expectancy at birth was only 61.7 years in 1935 when Social Security was established—lower than the original minimum retirement age. Today, U.S. life expectancy stands at 76.5 years, and is expected to climb to around 80 over the next 20 years. For most other industrialized countries, current and projected life expectancies are even higher. Meanwhile, fertility has dropped sharply. With the single exception of Ireland, birth rates in all the advanced countries are now below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. In Japan, the fertility rate is only 1.68; in Austria, 1.45; in Italy, a mere 1.33. Continued declines in fertility are expected.

The upshot of these demographic trends is a steady erosion in the funding base for social insurance benefits. In 1950, there were 16 workers in the United States for every retiree; today the ratio is only 3 to 1, and in 20 years it will have fallen to 2 to 1. Elsewhere the outlook is even bleaker: By 2020, worker-to-retiree ratios are expected to fall to 1.8 in France and Germany, and 1.4 in Italy and Japan.

Social insurance in the advanced countries is caught in a squeeze between rising life expectancy on one flank and falling fertility on the other. In that tightening vise, what once seemed so clever is now a catastrophe in the making. "When population growth slows down, so that we no longer have the comfortable Ponzi rate of growth or we even begin to register a decline in total numbers," a chastened Paul Samuelson wrote in 1985, "then the thorns along the primrose path reveal themselves with a vengeance."

The Crushing Burden of "Security"

Already today, public pension spending in the rich member countries of the OECD averages 24 percent of the total government budget, or 8 percent of GDP. To fund these enormous outlays, the tax burden imposed on current employees has reached punishing levels: In Italy, Germany, and Sweden, for example, the combination of employer and

Social insurance was born of contemptuous disregard for liberal principles: What mattered was not the well-being

employee contributions and personal income taxes now averages around 50 percent of gross labor costs. And while workers put more and more into the system, they can expect to receive less and less. In Sweden, the average rate of return for the generation retiring 25 years after the establishment of the public pension system approached 10 percent per year; for the generation retiring 20 years later, the rate of return had dropped to 3 percent. In the United States, real rates of return for two-earner couples now range from -0.45 percent to 2.13 percent, depending on income.

Even with rising tax rates and declining returns, pay-as-you-go systems throughout the advanced nations are heading toward financial collapse. In the United States, Social Security revenues currently exceed expenses, but the system is expected to begin running deficits in 2016. The annual shortfall is projected to be $1.3 trillion by 2030, a figure that represents more than two-thirds of the entire federal budget for 2001. Over the next 75 years, Social Security's total unfunded liabilities have an estimated present value of $9 trillion—as compared to the current national debt of $5.7 trillion. In Germany and Japan, the current unfunded liabilities of the public pension system are well over 100 percent of GDP; in France and Italy, they exceed 200 percent.

Since developing countries still have relatively young populations, one might expect that the problems with their pension systems remain in the distant future. One would be wrong. First of all, developing countries are making the transition from high birth and death rates to low fertility and mortality much faster than did the advanced nations. It took France 140 years to double the share of the population over 60 years of age (from 9 to 18 percent), while Belgium needed nearly 120 years; China, on the other hand, will repeat the feat in 34 years, and Venezuela will do it in 22. Between 1990 and 2030, the percentage of the world's population over 60 years of age is expected to increase from 9 percent to 16 percent, and most of that growth will occur in poorer countries.

In addition, administering public pension systems in poor countries is severely complicated by the large informal sectors endemic to those societies. A vicious circle is often triggered. Because many people work in the informal sector, payroll taxes (collected only in the formal sector) have to be higher than would otherwise be necessary. High payroll taxes, though, create incentives for even more people to retreat into the informal sector, thus necessitating even higher rates, which push more people into tax evasion, and so forth. Rising payroll tax rates in Uruguay, for example, caused the proportion of workers contributing to the system to fall from 81 percent in 1975 to 67 percent in 1989. In Brazil, evasion cut contribution revenues by more than a third during the 1980s.

The transitional economies of the former Soviet empire have inherited no end of problems from the Communist era, including tottering public pension systems. During Soviet rule, dependence on state pensions was nearly total, since occupational pensions and private saving were virtually nonexistent. With communism's collapse, the folly of that dependence has become abundantly clear. To begin with, the countries in question have populations that are nearly as old as those in the advanced nations: As of 1990, over 15 percent of people in former Communist bloc countries were over 60, as compared to 18 percent in the OECD. Like developing nations, though, they also have large informal sectors that erode the contribution base.

By the mid-1990s the pension systems of the transitional economies were saddled with cripplingly high dependency ratios. In Poland, pensioners totaled 61 percent of active workers by 1996; in Ukraine, the figure was 68 percent; in Bulgaria, 79 percent. To cope with this crushing burden, contribution rates were forced to remain at the punitive levels that had been set during Communist rule: 26 percent in the Czech Republic, 30.5 percent in Hungary, and 42 percent in Bulgaria. With the demise of the command economy, though, such high rates only accelerated workers' flight into the informal sector, aggravating dependency ratios even further.

Government-provided social insurance is defended on the ground that it shields retirees from the market risks

of the workers but the well-being of the state.

that attend private pension plans. Indeed it does, but only at the cost of subjecting current and future retirees to a far greater risk—the risk of living until the Ponzi scheme of pay-as-you-go pensions begins to break down. Over the past couple of decades retirees around the world have discovered, much to their chagrin, that substituting political risk for market risk has been a poor bargain indeed, as governments have been forced to renege on promises and slash benefits in order to stave off financial collapse.

Broken Promises, Spectacular Reform

The breach of faith has been especially severe in developing and transitional countries. Failure to adjust benefits for inflation was a favorite strategy in Latin America. The average real pension dropped 80 percent in Venezuela between 1974 and 1992 because of inflation; benefits fell 30 percent in Argentina between 1985 and 1992 for the same reason. In the transitional economies, a combination of inflation, explicit benefit cuts, and accumulation of arrears kept pension expenditures as a percentage of GDP more or less constant despite rapid growth in the number of pensioners. Consequently, in Romania, retirees' real per-capita income fell 23 percent between 1987 and 1994; in Hungary, the fall was 26 percent; in Latvia, 42 percent. In 1999, some four million elderly Russians were expected to survive on the minimum pension of 234 rubles (less than $10 dollars) a month. Millions more received nothing as the government simply failed to honor its obligations to its most vulnerable citizens.

On a less dramatic scale, chiseling has been occurring in rich countries as well. In the United States, a 1983 patch-job for Social Security included making benefits taxable for high-income recipients, skipping inflation indexation for one year, and gradually raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. Germany has scheduled an increase in the retirement age and reduced benefit levels by basing them on post-tax rather than pre-tax wages. Japan cut benefits back in 1986. Iceland shifted to a means-tested benefit in 1992, thereby eliminating payments altogether for thousands of retirees. While such moves and others like them may have been necessary under the circumstances, the fact remains that promises have been broken, repeatedly, and more infidelity is in store.

As the gap between promise and reality grows ever wider, countries around the world have begun to experiment with alternatives to the collectivized status quo. Leading the way was Chile, which in 1981 moved to phase out its pay-as-you-go system and replace it with privately owned individual retirement accounts. Instead of the old 26 percent payroll tax, workers are now required to deposit 10 percent of their wages into special savings accounts. Private companies, known as "administradoras de fondos de pensiones" (AFPs), manage the accounts. Workers are free to choose their AFP and switch their savings from one to another. Upon retirement, workers can either use their accumulated savings to purchase a lifetime annuity from an insurance company, or else leave the money in the account and make programmed withdrawals. Any money remaining in the account when the retiree dies can be passed on to heirs.

Workers who entered the labor force after the new system was in place were required to participate in the new system, while those who had already retired had their benefits under the old system guaranteed. Transitional workers were given the choice between sticking with the old system or switching to the new; if they switched, they were given a "recognition bond" to credit them for their prior contributions. The bond was placed in the worker's account and its amount was set so that, at retirement, it would be equal to the worker's accrued benefits under the old system.

Finally, the Chilean pension reform maintains a safety net in the form of a minimum pension guarantee. If for any reason a retiree's private benefits do not meet a minimum threshold, the government will supplement those benefits to bring them up to that threshold. Such supplemental payments are funded from general tax revenues, not a payroll tax.

Chile's pension reforms have been a spectacular success. Some 5.9 million workers owned private savings accounts by the end of 1998—up from 1.4 million at the

Social insurance in the advanced countries is caught in a squeeze between rising life expectancy on one flank and falling fertility on the other. In that tightening

end of 1981. More than 95 percent of the transitional workers who were given a choice have decided to join the new system. Assets in that system have grown to over 40 percent of GDP and are projected to reach 134 percent of GDP by 2020. The real rate of return on those assets averaged a gaudy 11.3 percent a year through 1999. A 1995 study found that pension benefits averaged 78 percent of a retiree's average salary over the last 10 years of his working life.

Meanwhile, the reforms have generated an impressive array of ancillary benefits. In conjunction with other market-oriented reforms, pension privatization has helped to raise Chile's national savings rate from around 10 percent in the late 1970s to over 25 percent at the beginning of the 21st century. Capital markets have deepened dramatically thanks to the accumulation of large private pension funds. Financial markets have grown in sophistication as well as size: Stock market liquidity has increased; new financial instruments like indexed annuities and mortgage-backed bonds have been developed; and transparency has improved with better disclosure and the emergence of credit-rating institutions. One econometric analysis credits the development of financial markets promoted by pension reform and related factors with increasing total factor productivity in Chile by 1 percentage point per year, or half the overall rate of increase.

Perhaps most important, pension reform has helped to end the class conflict that so convulsed Chile during the 1970s. "We recognized that when workers do not have property, they are vulnerable to demagogues," recalls José Piñera, who as minister of labor was the architect of Chile's pension privatization. (Full disclosure: Piñera and I are colleagues at the Cato Institute.) "The key insight of our pension reform was that, by allowing workers to acquire property in the form of financial capital, we could strengthen their commitment to the free market by aligning their interests with the health of the economy."

Piñera and his fellow reformers turned the tables on Marx: Workers became owners of the means of production, but through the expansion of the market system rather than its overthrow. In the process, Marxist-style collectivism lost much of its appeal. "Since our reforms we have had three center-left governments," observes Piñera, "and none of them has touched the core of our major free-market policies. And one reason for this is that nobody dares to threaten the value of the workers' retirement accounts."

Recovering from Dysfunction

A host of other countries have followed Chile's example in recent years. Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay have all instituted mandatory private savings plans that, to a greater or lesser extent, supplant the old pay-as-you-go approach. In most of these countries the new private system only partially replaces the pay-as-you-go system. In Hungary, for example, workers contribute 6 percent to private accounts while a 24 percent payroll tax continues to support the old system. In Sweden, a 16 percent payroll tax goes to maintain the old system, while 2.5 percent of a worker's salary now goes into a private account. The Bush administration is now considering a similar partial privatization for the United States.

Partial reforms are still only a partial solution. Private accounts will help to generate higher returns for future generations of retirees, but those generations will still be saddled with a dysfunctional, if somewhat shrunken, pay-as-you-go Ponzi scheme. The longer that thorough reform is delayed, the more unfavorable the demographic situation becomes and the more onerous the burdens of maintaining the old system are.

It must be acknowledged, though, that the path toward full-scale privatization—with government-provided benefits limited to ensuring some guaranteed minimum—is arduous and lined with hazards. The most obvious hurdle to overcome is financing the transition from the old to the new system. Phasing out the traditional system does not create any new costs; on the contrary, by preventing future unfunded liabilities from accruing, reform contains and ultimately cuts off the flow of red ink. But there is a temporary cash-flow problem: Benefits under the old system must

vise, what once seemed so clever is now a catastrophe in the making.

be paid out to current retirees, but the contributions that formerly funded those benefits are now being directed into private accounts. Other sources of funds must be tapped to pay off the remaining liabilities—which can be staggeringly large.

The Chilean experience shows that this obstacle, though daunting, is not insuperable. The implicit debt of its pay-as-you-go system had grown in excess of 100 percent of GDP. But shifting most current workers out of the old system quickly slashed that figure. To deal with what remained, Chile used a variety of methods. It continued a portion of the payroll tax for a number of years, sold off state-owned enterprises to raise revenue, cut other government expenditures, issued new government bonds, and painlessly reaped the benefits of the additional tax revenues that came from a faster-growing economy. Together, these measures have sufficed to cover the transition's financing requirements, which have ranged from 1.4 to 4.4 percent of GDP per year.

Other risks lurk in designing a new system. While some measure of prudential regulation may be necessary, especially in countries with underdeveloped financial markets, excessive government meddling in how private accounts are to be invested can reduce returns for savers—possibly catastrophically. Chile, for example, still requires AFPs to guarantee a minimum return relative to other AFPs. Consequently there is little difference in the portfolios of the various AFPs, therefore denying savers the opportunity to choose different mixes of risk and return. Also, Chile has rigid restrictions on the commissions charged by AFPs that prevent discounts based on maintaining a specific balance or keeping an account for some specified amount of time. Thus prevented from competing effectively on product or price, the AFPs attempt to lure customers through marketing ploys—just as American banks in the days of interest rate controls offered toasters for new accounts. Such empty competition drives up administrative costs.

In Mexico, meanwhile, fund managers are required to invest a minimum of 65 percent of assets in government securities—a grievously wrongheaded mandate that risks turning the system into a dumping ground for government debt. A fiscal crisis, not a remote contingency in Mexico by any means, could wipe out the retirement savings of a generation. The Mexican system also prohibits investments in equities or any foreign assets. Such restrictions stifle the new sophistication in financial markets that is an enormous side benefit of privatization, as well as preventing prudent portfolio diversification. In poorer countries with underdeveloped financial markets, it is especially important that savers be allowed to invest in high-quality foreign assets.

Whether in the form of regulation or market participation, overweening government control over investments in a "privatized" system merely substitutes one form of hyper-centralization for another. Indeed, for decades many developing countries have pursued this variation on top-down control in a pure and explicit form. Rather than adopting pay-as-you-go systems, these countries, including India, Malaysia, Singapore, and a number of African nations, created retirement plans in which there is a single retirement fund or "provident fund" and the government manages all the investment assets.

These provident fund systems do avoid the perverse Ponzi-scheme dynamics of conventionally collectivized social insurance—but only to fall prey to other dysfunctions. Specifically, the government as investment-fund monopolist is immune from competitive pressure to earn a decent return; consequently, it is not constrained from investing in ways that are politically advantageous but economically dubious. Unsurprisingly, the performance of provident fund systems has ranged from lackluster to disastrous. In the latter category, Kenya's system averaged a negative 3.8 percent rate of return during the 1980s, while returns in Zambia averaged negative 23.4 percent.

Social insurance is not menaced by excessive reliance on markets. On the contrary, it is the systematic suppression of market principles that has put the retirement security of millions in jeopardy. Undoing past mistakes will require formidable resolve, as will resisting the continuing temptation to attempt control from above. But if the resolve can be found, the proper direction is clear: For the sake of retirement security, for the sake of true social cohesion, the growing movement for market-based reform in social insurance is the one best hope there is. ◘

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The public is saying:

"No more Drug War!"

A recent Ridder/Braden opinion poll in the state of Colorado shows:[1]

73% of voters believe we should decrease criminal penalties for possession of small quantities of drugs from a felony to a misdemeanor and spend the money saved on prisons to increase drug treatment and prevention.

85% believe the current war on drugs addresses the symptoms of drug abuse but fails to solve the underlying causes.

83% of Colorado voters believe we are losing the war on drugs.

A November national Zogby Poll indicated:

61% of the America public opposes arresting and jailing nonviolent marijuana smokers.

67% oppose the use of federal law enforcement agencies to close patient cooperatives where medical marijuana is legal under state law.[2]

In the last three election cycles the public has approved fourteen state wide reform initiatives!

Why won't Congress listen?

[1] Ridder/Braden, Inc. July 2001. More information: contact The Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, POB 1156, Boulder, CO 80306. See: http://www.prison-moratorium.org.

[2] Zogby International, December 2001. More information: contact the NORML Foundation, 202-483-8751.

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The Politics of Dead Children

Have sanctions against Iraq murdered millions?

Matt Welch

ARE "A MILLION innocent children...dying at this time...in Iraq" because of U.S. sanctions, as Osama bin Laden claimed in his October 7 videotaped message to the world? Has the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) discovered that "at least 200 children are dying every day...as a direct result of sanctions," as advocacy journalist John Pilger maintains on his Web site? Is it official U.N. belief that 5,000 Iraqi children under the age of 5 are dying each month due to its own policy, as writers of letters to virtually every U.S. newspaper have stated repeatedly during the past three years?

The short answer to all of these questions is no. The sanctions, first imposed in 1990 after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, are administered by the U.N., not the U.S. They were first imposed on all exports from Iraq and occupied Kuwait, and all non-humanitarian imports, in an effort to persuade Saddam Hussein to retreat within his own borders. After the Gulf War, they were broadened to include a dismantling of Iraq's biological, chemical, nuclear, and missile-based weapons systems, out of fear that Hussein would otherwise lash out again. Estimates of sanctions-era "excess" child deaths—the number above the normal mortality rate—vary widely due to politics and inadequate data, especially concerning children older than 5. The dictatorial Iraqi government, which has blamed nearly every civilian funeral since 1991 on sanctions, claims there have been more than 600,000 deaths of under-5-year-olds these past 11 years (4,500 per month) and 1.5 million deaths overall.

While firefighters were still pulling out warm body parts from Ground Zero, foreign policy critic Noam Chomsky and his followers on college campuses and alternative-weekly staffs nationwide were insisting that it was vital to understand the "context" of the September 11 massacre: that U.S.-led sanctions were killing "5,000 children a month" in Iraq. Meanwhile, on the Iraqi government's own Web site, the number of under-5 deaths *from all causes* for the month of September was listed as 2,932.

Arriving at a reliable raw number of dead people is hard enough; assigning responsibility for the ongoing tragedy borders on the purely speculative. Competing factors include sanctions, drought, hospital policy, breast-feeding education, Saddam Hussein's government, depressed oil prices, the Iraqi economy's almost total dependence on oil exports and food imports, destruction from the Iran-Iraq and Persian Gulf wars, differences in conditions between the autonomous north and the Saddam-controlled south, and a dozen other variables difficult to measure without direct independent access to the country.

The dictatorial Iraqi government claims there have been more than 600,000 deaths of under-5-year-olds these past 11 years.

Confusing the issue still further are basic questions about the sanctions themselves. Should the U.N. impose multilateral economic sanctions to keep a proven tyrant from developing weapons to launch more wars against his neighbors? If sanctions are inherently immoral, what other tools short of war can the international community use? Is this particular sanctions regime more unreasonable than others that haven't triggered humanitarian crises? How much should we blame Saddam Hussein for rejecting the U.N.'s "oil-for-food" humanitarian offer for six years, and expelling weapons inspectors in 1998? Most important, has Iraq made headway since then in pursuing nuclear and biological weapons?

Oleg Nikishin / Getty Images

True or false? More Iraqi children have died as the result of sanctions than the combined toll of two atomic bombs on Japan.

Yet all this murkiness has not deterred advocates of sanctions from claiming absolute certainty on the issue. The warmongering *New Republic*, for example, announced in October that the notion that "sanctions have caused widespread suffering" was simply "false." Writing in *National Review* in December, former army intelligence analyst Robert Stewart asserted that "resources are available in Iraq. Even under the sanctions, Iraq's people need not starve."

The chasm between claims made by sanction supporters and opponents is enough to make inquisitive people throw their hands up in the air. Such despair is not exactly conducive to healthy debate, which is especially important at a time when President Bush has made it clear that Iraq must cooperate with weapons inspection or become the next target of the War on Terrorism. A closer look at the controversy over dead Iraqi babies shows that opponents of sanctions have a compelling case to make. Although they often undermine their own position with outrageous exaggerations, their critics show a similar disregard for the facts when they blithely dismiss concerns about the impact of sanctions on innocent people.

Origins of a Whopper

The idea that sanctions in Iraq have killed half a million children (or 1 million, or 1.5 million, depending on the hysteria of the source) took root in 1995 and 1996, on the basis of two transparently flawed studies, one inexplicable doubling of the studies' statistics, and a non-denial on 60 *Minutes*.

In August 1995, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) gave officials from the Iraqi Ministry of Health a questionnaire on child mortality and asked them to conduct a survey in the capital city of Baghdad. On the basis of this five-day, 693-household, Iraq-controlled study, the FAO announced in November that "child mortality had increased nearly five fold" since the pre-sanctions era. As embargo critic Richard Garfield, a public health specialist at Columbia University, wrote in his own comprehensive 1999 survey of under-5 deaths in Iraq, "The 1995 study's conclusions were subsequently withdrawn by the authors....Notwithstanding the retraction of the original data, their estimate of more than 500,000 excess child deaths due to the embargo is still often repeated by sanctions critics."

In March 1996, the World Health Organization (WHO) published its own report on the humanitarian crisis. It reprinted figures—provided solely by the Iraqi Ministry of Health—showing that a *total* of 186,000 children under the age of 5 died between 1990 and 1994 in the 15 Saddam-governed provinces. According to these government figures, the number of deaths jumped nearly 500 percent, from 8,903 in 1990 to 52,905 in 1994.

Somehow, based largely on these two reports—a five-day study in Baghdad showing a "five fold" increase in child deaths and a Ministry of Health claim that a total of 186,000 children under 5 had died from all causes between 1990 and 1994—a New York-based advocacy group called the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) concluded in a May 1996 survey that "these mortality rates translate into a figure of over half a million excess child deaths as a result of sanctions." In addition to doubling the Iraqi government's highest number and attributing all deaths to the embargo, CESR suggested a comparison that proved popular among the growing legions of sanctions critics: "In simple terms, more Iraqi children have died as a result of sanctions than the combined toll of two atomic

bombs on Japan." The word *genocide* started making its way into the discussion.

Still, the report might well have ended up in the dustbin of bad mathematics had a CESR fact-finding tour of Iraq not been filmed by Lesley Stahl of *60 Minutes*. In a May 12, 1996, report that later won her an Emmy and an Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Journalism Award, Stahl used CESR's faulty numbers and atomic-bomb imagery to confront Madeleine Albright, then the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "We have heard that a half million children have died," Stahl said. "I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And—and you know, is the price worth it?" Albright replied, "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it."

It was the non-denial heard 'round the world. In the hands of sanctions opponents and foreign policy critics, it was portrayed as a confession of fact, even though neither Albright nor the U.S. government has ever admitted to such a ghastly number (nor had anybody aside from CESR and Lesley Stahl ever suggested such a thing until May 1996). The *60 Minutes* exchange is very familiar to readers of Arab newspapers, college dailies, and liberal journals of opinion. Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan mentioned it several times during their respective presidential campaigns.

After September 11, the anecdote received new life, as in this typically imaginative interpretation by *Harper's* Editor Lewis Lapham in the magazine's November issue: "When Madeleine Albright, then the American secretary of state [sic], was asked in an interview on *60 Minutes* whether she had considered the resulting death of 500,000 Iraqi children (of malnutrition and disease), she said, 'We think the price is worth it.'"

Albright has been dogged by protesters at nearly all her campus appearances the past several years, and rightly so: It was a beastly thing to say, and she should have refuted the figures. Quietly, a month after the World Trade Center attack, she finally apologized for her infamous performance. "I shouldn't have said it," she said during a speech at the University of Southern California. "You can believe this or not, but my comments were taken out of context."

The other, far more credible source of the 500,000 number is a pair of 1999 UNICEF studies that estimated the under-5 mortality rates of both Iraqi regions based on interviews with a total of 40,000 households. "If the substantial reduction in the under-five mortality rate during the 1980s had continued through the 1990s," the report concluded, "there would have been half a million fewer deaths of children under-five in the country as a whole during the eight year period 1991 to 1998." If the expected mortality rate had stayed level rather than continuing its downward slope, the excess death number would be more like 420,000.

Significantly, UNICEF found child mortality actually decreased in the autonomous north (from 80.2 per 100,000 in 1984–89 to 70.8 in 1994–98) while more than doubling in the south (from 56 per 100,000 to 130.6). This is Exhibit A for those who, like *The New Republic*, argue that Saddam alone is responsible for Iraq's humanitarian crisis. When the report was released, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy attributed the difference in mortality trends to "the large amount of international aid pumped into northern Iraq at the end of the [Persian Gulf] war."

The UNICEF report took pains to spread the blame for increased mortality in the south, mentioning factors such as a dramatic increase in the bottle-only feeding of infants in place of more nutritious (and less likely to be tainted) breast milk. "It's very important not to just say that everything rests on sanctions," Bellamy said in a subsequent interview. "It is also the result of wars and the reduction in investment in resources for primary health care."

But in the hands of sanctions opponents and some news organizations, these findings were translated into a U.N. admission that sanctions were "directly responsible" for killing half a million children (or even "infants"). In September 2001 alone, the UNICEF report was mischaracterized in *The Boston Globe*, *The Buffalo News*, the Akron *Beacon Journal*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *The Charleston Gazette*, the Wilmington *Sunday Star-News*, and the *Chicago Tribune* (by a Northwestern University journalism professor, no less).

By November, UNICEF was annoyed enough with the frequent misinterpretations to send out regular corrective press releases, saying things like: "The surveys were never intended to provide an absolute figure of how many children have died in Iraq as a result of sanctions." Rather, they "show that if the substantial reductions in child mortality in

Sanctions give anti-American enclaves, whether in Cairo or Berkeley or Peshawar, one of their few half-convincing arguments about evil U.S. policy since the end of the Cold War.

Iraq during the 1980s had continued through the 1990s—in other words if there hadn't been two wars, if sanctions hadn't been introduced and if investment in social services had been maintained—there would have been 500,000 fewer deaths of children under five."

Sanctions critics almost always leave out one other salient fact: The vast majority of the horror stats they quote apply to the period before March 1997, when the oil-for-food program delivered its first boatload of supplies (nearly six years after the U.N. first proposed the idea to a reluctant Iraqi government). In the past four years of oil-for-food, Iraq has exported around 3 billion barrels of oil, generating $40 billion in revenue, which has resulted in the delivery of $18 billion of humanitarian and oil-equipment supplies, with another $16 billion in the pipeline. (The rest is used to cover administrative costs and reparations to Kuwait.)

As the U.N. Office for the Iraqi Program stated in a September 28, 2001 report, "With the improved funding level for the program, the Government of Iraq is indeed in a position to address the nutritional and health concerns of the Iraqi people, particularly the nutritional status of the children." Even two years earlier, Richard Garfield noted in his survey that "the most severe embargo-related damages [have] already ended."

Anyone who tells you more children will perish in Iraq this month than Americans died on September 11 is cutting and pasting inflated mid-1990s statistics onto a country that has changed significantly since then. Knowingly or not, these critics are mangling the facts to prove a debatable point and in the process damaging their own cause.

The Truth is Bad Enough

Two weeks after the hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, I began looking in earnest for trustworthy sources of information about the effects of sanctions on Iraq. I was joined in my search by a half-dozen or so e-mail acquaintances who approached the question from a broadly similar viewpoint: If sanctions *are* killing Iraqi babies, then Osama Bin Laden has a legitimate propaganda tool, and the U.S. has blood on its hands that demands immediate attention. So let's find the facts, weigh them against Saddam's weapons capabilities, and proceed from there.

It immediately became obvious that sanctions opponents, especially in the U.S., would be a hindrance, not a help. "I'm a little disgusted at the way the Naderite left has used the issue, especially when they have no backup for the claims they are making," one of my co-conspirators, Eric Mauro, wrote me. "They may be right, but they are so inept at arguing that it's dangerous to take their word for it."

The man who launched the American anti-sanctions movement as we know it is a University of Texas journalism professor named Robert Jensen. His Web site's "factsheet" on Iraq contains two lies right off the bat. Citing WHO, he claims that "each month 5,000 to 6,000 children die as a result of the sanctions." And citing UNICEF, he asserts that "approximately 250 people die every day in Iraq due to the sanctions."

Jensen, who teaches "critical thinking," drifted onto the national radar screen days after the terrorist attacks, when he wrote a column published in ZNet, CommonDreams.org, and the *Houston Chronicle* titled "U.S. Just As Guilty of Committing Own Violent Acts." He has opposed the war against Afghanistan (not to mention Serbia), teaches the journalism of Mumia Abu-Jamal, and once wrote a column about how

the "U.S. middle class, particularly the white middle class, is probably the single biggest impediment to justice the world has ever known."

Jensen's cohorts in kick-starting the anti-sanctions movement were *intifada*-supporting professor Edward Said, "people's historian" Howard Zinn, and Noam Chomsky, a man who has rarely met a foreign policy he couldn't describe as "genocide." The four issued a joint statement in January 1999 condemning the situation in Iraq as "sanctioned mass-murder that is nearing holocaust proportions."

These four men have authored reams of hyperbolic nonsense since September 11. Isn't it reasonable to conclude that anything they and Saddam Hussein agree upon must be false?

No, actually, it's not, and therein lies the problem. Any sustained inquiry into the sanctions issue runs up against waves of propaganda and reckless disregard for the truth, and it would be all too easy to declare the issue settled after a quick dismissal of the most glaring lies. But that would be an abdication of responsibility. Many of those who support continued pressure on Saddam Hussein tend to focus on a few key counterpoints while ignoring piles of haunting in-country surveys and the damning testimony of former U.N. officials who have quit to campaign full-time against U.S. policy in Iraq. Sanctions proponents, if they are not careful, run the risk of aping the foolish debate tactics of the critics they condemn.

Take, for example, the lowered mortality rates in the northern provinces of Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil—the smoking gun of the sanctions-don't-kill crowd. *The New Republic* claims the autonomous Kurdish area "is subject to exactly the same sanctions as the rest of the country." This is false: Under the oil-for-food regime, the north, which contains 13 percent of the Iraqi population, receives 13 percent of all oil proceeds, a portion of that in cash. Saddam's regions, with 87 percent of the population, receive 59 percent of the money (recently increased by the U.N. Security Council from 53 percent), none of it in cash. (Of the rest, 25 percent goes to a Kuwaiti compensation fund, and the rest covers U.N. expenses.) It just isn't true that the sanctions are "exactly the same" in both parts of Iraq. And there are other factors affecting the north-south disparity: International aid agencies have been active in the areas protected by no-fly zones since 1991, and the Turkish border is said to be suitably porous for smuggling (although Saddam has been caught smuggling several times in the past decade).

The get-Saddam camp also likes to point out that sanctions haven't seemed to inflict similar grief in countries such as Libya and Yugoslavia. To which Richard Garfield, who compared the various penalized countries, has an effective rebuttal: "Embargoes with the greatest impact on the health of the general population are usually those which are multilateral and comprehensive, occur in countries with heavy import dependence, are implemented rapidly, and are accompanied by other economic and social blows to a country. Iraq shared each of these characteristics."

Those who get past the initial frustrations of researching the topic usually end up on Richard Garfield's doorstep. His 1999 report—which included a logistic regression analysis that re-examined four previously published child mortality surveys and added bits from 75 or so other relevant studies—picked apart the faulty methodologies of his predecessors, criticized the bogus claims of the anti-sanctions left, admitted when the data were shaky, and generally used conservative numbers. Among his many interesting findings was that every sanctions regime except the one imposed on apartheid South Africa led to limitations of food and medicine imports, even though such goods were almost always officially exempt from the embargo. "In many countries," he wrote, "the embargo-related lack of capital was more important than direct restrictions on importing medicine or food."

Garfield concluded that between August 1991 and March 1998 there were at least 106,000 excess deaths of children under 5, with a "more likely" worst-case sum of 227,000. (He recently updated the latter figure to 350,000 through this year.) Of those deaths, he estimated one-quarter were "mainly associated with the Gulf war." The chief causes, in his view, were "contaminated water, lack of high quality foods, inadequate breast feeding, poor weaning practices, and inadequate supplies in the curative health care system. This was the product of both a lack of some essential goods, and inadequate or inefficient use of existing essential goods."

Ultimately, Garfield argued, sanctions played an undeniably important role. "Even a small number of documentable excess deaths is an expression of a humanitarian disas-

Any visitor to Cuba can see within 24 hours the futility of slapping an embargo on a sheltered population that is otherwise inclined to detest its government and embrace its *yanqui* neighbors.

ter, and this number is not small," he concluded. "[And] excess deaths should...be seen as the tip of the iceberg among damages to occur among under five-year-olds in Iraq in the 1990s....The humanitarian disaster which has occurred in Iraq far exceeds what may be any reasonable level of acceptable damages according to the principles of discrimination and proportionality used in warfare....To the degree that economic sanctions complicate access to and utilization of essential goods, sanctions regulations should be modified immediately."

Garfield's conclusion echoes that of literally every international agency that has performed extensive studies in Iraq. In 1999 a U.N. Humanitarian Panel found that "the gravity of the humanitarian situation of the Iraqi people is indisputable and cannot be overstated." UNICEF's Carol Bellamy, at the time her landmark report was released, said, "Even if not all suffering in Iraq can be imputed to external factors, especially sanctions, the Iraqi people would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the Security Council and the effects of war." The former U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, Denis Halliday, travels around the world calling the policy he once enforced "genocide." His replacement, Hans von Sponeck, also resigned in protest of the U.N.'s "criminal policy."

Losing the Loonies

There have been no weapons inspectors in Iraq since 1998. As a result it is exceptionally difficult to know with precision what nuclear and biological weapons Saddam actually has on hand or in development. From the beginning, economic sanctions have been tied to what foreign policy analyst Mark Phythian described in *World Affairs* as "the first attempt to disarm a country against its will." After September 11, the issue of an America-hating tyrant arming himself to the teeth has seemed more pressing than easing an embargo that blocks his access to money.

Yet the basic argument against all economic sanctions remains: namely, that they tend to punish civilians more than governments and to provide dictators with a gift-wrapped propaganda tool. Any visitor to Cuba can see within 24 hours the futility of slapping an embargo on a sheltered population that is otherwise inclined to detest its government and embrace its *yanqui* neighbors. Sanctions give anti-American enclaves, whether in Cairo or Berkeley or Peshawar, one of their few half-convincing arguments about evil U.S. policy since the end of the Cold War.

It seems awfully hard not to conclude that the embargo on Iraq has been ineffective (especially since 1998) and that it has, at the least, contributed to more than 100,000 deaths since 1990. With Bush set to go to war over Saddam's noncompliance with the military goals of the sanctions, there has never been a more urgent time to confront the issue with clarity.

That means losing the loonies on the left. Already there are signs of mounting liberal impatience with the routine smokescreens emanating from the usual anti-sanctions rabble. *Slate*, *The Guardian*, and even *The Nation* all published sober correctives of dead-Iraqi-baby inflation toward the end of 2001, decisively backing Richard Garfield over Robert Jensen. And if Noam Chomsky no longer leads this particular coalition of critics, maybe they're not so wrong after all. ◘

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Greenpeace

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— Patrick Moore, Greenpeace Co-Founder, describing his former organization

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HE SAYS NO TO CIVILIZATION AND SURVIVAL

"I CAN TELL YOU ONE THING and you can tell someone else what I said, but in the meantime I can turn around and deny it, and all you can do is call me a damn liar." "Well I think it was the Germans that originated this modern concept of peace through strength." "I'd drop a low-yield atomic bomb on Chinese lines in North Vietnam, or maybe shell 'em with the Seventh Fleet." "But defoliation of the forests [or low-yield atomic weapons] could well be done." "That word brinkmanship is a great word." "I've been against it [foreign economic aid] for years, and I'll vote against it this year, too." "As for those who fear military men, I say fear the civilians — they're taking over." "If we could give the NATO command the right to decide when to use nuclear weapons we could bring a third to half of our troops home." "The United States should resume U2 flights over Soviet territory." "Like a three dollar bill its a phony." "There's no way to enforce civil rights." "Lets leave it up to the States." "I think T.V.A. should be turned over to free enterprise even if they could only get one dollar for it." "It's their baby." "[Both parties] made a mistake in trying to be specific about civil rights [in their 1960 platforms]" "Let welfare be a private concern. Let it be promoted by individuals and families, by churches, private hospitals, religious service organizations, community charities and other institutions that have been established for this purpose." "When you say to Johnny 'Don't worry about the old man or your mother, we're going to take care of them when they get older,' you've destroyed there the freedom of responsability." "The inescapable and most harmful by-products of such operations as relief, social security, collective bargaining and public housing has been the weakening of the individual personality and of self-reliance." "The child has no right to an education. In most cases, the children will get along very well without it." "The united states is a Republic and not a Democracy." "Get rid of the graduated income tax." "Sometimes I think this country would be better off if we could just saw off the Eastern seaboard and let it float out to sea."

43/500

Ben Shahn

He Was Right

Looking back at the Goldwater moment

Glenn Garvin

Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus, by Rick Perlstein, New York: Hill and Wang, 671 pages, $30

CURSED WITH TWO plundering, rapacious younger sisters, I grew up with a highly developed sense of private property (it's *my* room, get out) and freedom of association (I don't *want* to have a tea party with you and Mrs. Flopsy). This did not always put me in good stead with my parents, or with an angry sixth-grade teacher who insisted that no decent human being could question the Civil Rights Act of 1964. My doubts—if you own a restaurant, aren't you entitled to decide who can eat there? Isn't that what it means when something is *yours*?—were dismissed as callous racism, not only by the teacher, but by the other kids as well. Imagine my astonishment when I heard the Republican presidential candidate on TV agreeing with me. Barry Goldwater quickly became my passion. I wore his campaign button to school, handed out leaflets door to door, and watched the returns election night in crushed disbelief as he absorbed the most hideous beating in American political history.

As it turned out, my experience was by no means unique. Goldwater's doomed candidacy was the political awakening for millions of young Americans thrilled by his promise of a campaign that was "a choice, not an echo." They did not go back to sleep when he lost. They would shift the tectonic plates of the two-party system, forcing a profound realignment; remap the political landscape, drawing boundaries that 40 years later show no signs of change; introduce the concept of ideology into American elections; create sharp tensions within the Republican Party that persist to this day; and, eventually, elect a president, Ronald Reagan, whose rhetoric, if not his actual policies, would dominate the nation's political discourse for the last two decades of the 20th century.

Before the Storm, the first book by Rick Perlstein, a regular contributor to *The Nation*, is only the first part of this tale—Barry Goldwater's rise and fall as a national political figure. The former was wildly improbable—the ascent of a half-Jewish department store owner from a distant state that most Americans thought of as a rattlesnake-infested desert. The latter was utterly inevitable—the self-destruction of a politician who was maddeningly, hilariously, lovably impolitic. You may remember that Goldwater went into the South and off-handedly mentioned that the Tennessee Valley Authority ought to be sold. But it's only when Perlstein describes him taking a swig of Gold Water, a soft drink bottled by an ardent supporter, and barking, "This tastes like piss! I wouldn't drink it with gin!" that you realize how insanely unsuited for politics Goldwater really was.

Yet he connected with many Americans in a deeply personal way. Lyndon Johnson may have creamed Goldwater at the polls, but it was Goldwater who was truly a grassroots phenomenon. About 3.9 million Americans worked in his campaign, twice as many as in Johnson's. More than 1 million individual donors gave money to Goldwater, almost 20 times as many who contributed money to John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon *combined* four years earlier. Worried LBJ operatives reported to headquarters late in the campaign that Goldwater bumper stickers outnumbered those of Johnson by a 10-to-1 margin. Clearly, Goldwater touched something in the American consciousness.

To understand what it was, you have to consider the dreary state of American politics in the early 1960s. The Republican Party had never really recovered from the shellacking it took in 1932. The Democrats had controlled Congress almost contin-

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uously for three decades and had won six of the last eight presidential elections; only the decision of war hero Dwight Eisenhower to run as a Republican had kept it from being eight straight. Because of the relentless battering—or perhaps it was vice-versa—the GOP was mostly dominated by FDR wannabes like Thomas Dewey and Wendell Willkie, "the simple barefoot Wall Street lawyer." Both parties essentially accepted the New Deal precept that modern society (particularly its economic component) was too complex to be left to its own devices; the federal government had to provide an ever-stronger guiding hand. Eisenhower's victory in 1952 only offered more of the same: He set up the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and appointed Earl Warren to the Supreme Court.

Onto this arid terrain, Barry Goldwater burst like a spring shower. An unenthusiastic politician elected to the Phoenix city council as part of a reform slate, he became a U.S. senator almost by accident, running in an unwinnable race as a sacrificial lamb as a favor to Arizona's tiny Republican Party. He then pulled off an upset when the overconfident incumbent barely set foot in the state during the election. He took the national stage for the first time during the McClellan Committee hearings on mob control of labor unions in 1958.

Goldwater was less interested in Jimmy Hoffa's trickery with Teamster finances than he was in Walter Reuther's ambition to couple the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party in an effort to bring about a centrally planned U.S. economy. Goldwater used the hearings—including, eventually, a direct confrontation with Reuther in the witness chair—to make the point that the growing power of labor unions was anything but democratic in the way most Americans understood that term. Workers were forced to join the unions by closed shop contracts, then their money was extracted through compulsory dues that went, in large part, to the Democratic Party. "I would rather have Hoffa stealing my money," Goldwater declared, "than Reuther stealing my freedom."

It might be easy enough to dismiss this as labor-bashing grandstanding (and Perlstein certainly tries), but there was a stubborn consistency to Goldwater's critique of American politics. At a time when Eisenhower was hugely popular and Goldwater desperately needed his support for a shaky reelection bid, the Arizonan nonetheless went to the Senate floor and unleashed a scorching tirade against the president for succumbing to "the siren song of socialism" in preparing his record-setting 1958 budget. Soon after, he ripped the farm subsidies so dear to the hearts of Midwestern Republicans. He sneered at the passion of both parties for technocratic reformers: "I have little interest in streamlining government or making it more efficient for I mean to reduce its size."

Nor was Goldwater's philosophy purely political. He stressed both personal liberty and personal responsibility, and warned against the propensity of modern liberalism to see society as a collection of groups: "The conservative knows that to regard men as part of an undifferentiated mass is to consign him to ultimate slavery....Every man, for his individual good and for the good of his society, is responsible for his own development. The choices that govern his life are choices he must make; they cannot be made by any other human being."

Goldwater, in short, was a politician of *ideas*, not knee-jerk reaction or pork-barrel plenitude. His ideas appealed to a large segment of the population (Goldwater called them "the forgotten Americans")—instinctively wary of the growing power in Washington and the elite class that wielded it—that had long been without a political voice. Their elation at the end of their isolation showed in their wild response to Goldwater's speeches, though he was generally a humdrum speaker who only occasionally drifted up into the oratorical jetstream where Ronald Reagan would later cruise.

He appealed not only to traditional conservatives but to young Americans harboring quiet worries that their lives were being put together on a social assembly line over which they had no control. Goldwater's cry against conformity struck a chord, loudly, with them. Later, as he ran for president, the news media would delight in caricaturing Goldwater as a reactionary loon trying to rub out an entire century of American history. (Editorial cartoons frequently showed his supporters carrying signs reading "Goldwater in 1864.") But his fears about the loss of individuality to the madding crowd were on the razor edge of the social debate on America's restless college campuses, and shared much with the early manifestos of Students for a Democratic Society.

Every coffee-house folksinger in the country was droning Malvina Reynolds' song "Little Boxes" about a cookie-cutter society in which suburban commuters and their houses,

wives, children, and martinis were indistinguishable from one another: "And they're all made out of ticky-tacky and they all look just the same." No dorm room's bookshelf could be without David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd*, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, along with Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Ayn Rand. It was fertile ground for the Arizonan's message, and the initial boomlet for a national Goldwater candidacy —as Richard Nixon's vice-presidential candidate in 1960—owed much to a spontaneously formed Youth for Goldwater group.

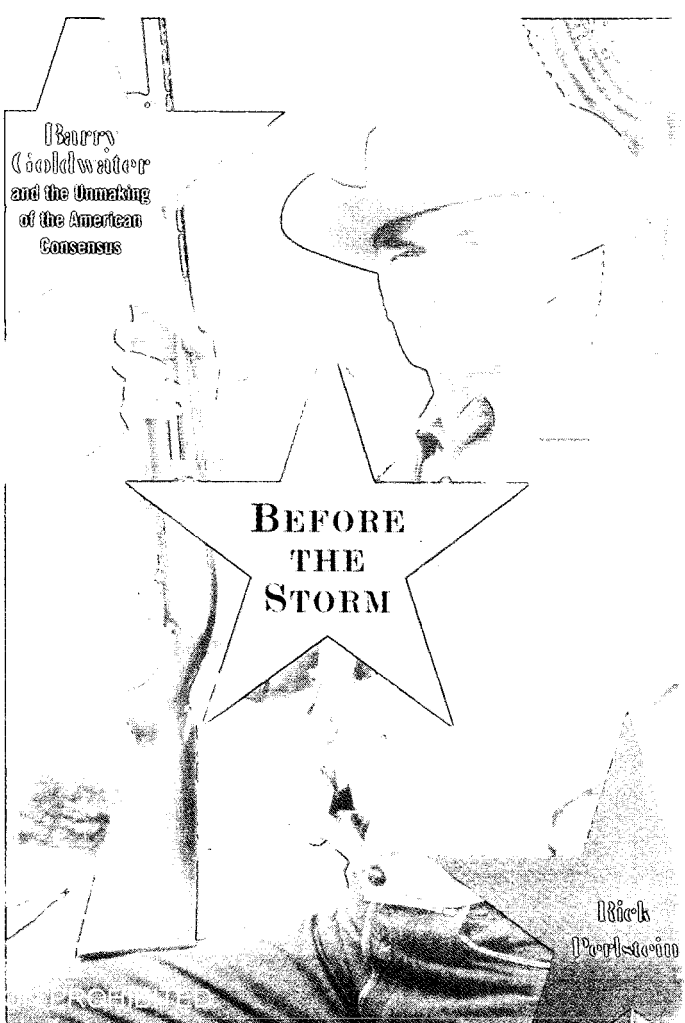
But the GOP establishment would have none of Goldwater in 1960. Nixon chose as his running mate Henry Cabot Lodge, a prototype of the liberal Northeastern Republicans. When Nixon lost, conservatives were determined to take matters into their own hands. When Goldwater was reluctant to run, they formed a secret draft committee that went about organizing for the 1964 GOP convention. Goldwater was close to locking up the 655 convention delegates he needed for the nomination before he even knew he was a candidate.

The nomination, unfortunately, was followed by a truly catastrophic general election campaign in which Goldwater won only six states. Goldwater was doomed even before he started, his fate settled by the bullets in Dealey Plaza. In the fall of 1963, Kennedy's erratic foreign policy and public uneasiness over his support for the civil rights movement made him look vulnerable. His approval rating had dropped from the 70s to 57 percent. An anti-Kennedy book by conservative hatchet man Victor Lasky soared to the top of *The New York Times* bestseller list, and *Look* magazine ran a feature headlined "JFK Could Lose."

But the bullets that cut down Kennedy that November ricocheted crazily through the ranks of his political enemies. Though the assassin was a lifelong Marxist who had defected to the Soviet Union and was seeking a visa to Cuba only weeks before the shooting, the blame, unaccountably, settled on the American right. Goldwater's popularity plunged 16 percentage points in a matter of weeks, never to recover. And even Americans who didn't hold him responsible for Kennedy's death were queasy about casting a vote that might result in the seating of the third president in 14 months.

Their apprehensions were fed at every opportunity by journalists who barely tried to conceal their shilling for Lyndon Johnson. Walter Cronkite falsely reported that Goldwater snapped "no comment" when asked about Kennedy's assassination. His CBS colleague Daniel Schorr managed to top that, claiming that Goldwater would officially open his campaign in "Hitler's stomping ground... Bavaria, the center of Germany's right wing." (Actually Goldwater had accepted an invitation to visit a U.S. Army base in Germany from his buddy Lt. Gen. William Quinn, father of the well-known Hitler Youth leader Sally Quinn, who would later run the secret bund at the *Washington Post* Style section.) Late in the campaign, Johnson told the reporters covering his campaign that Goldwater was already beaten, and asked them which Republican congressmen most deserved to be purged: "Give me some names and either Hubert or I will try to get into their districts in the next few days and talk against 'em." The reporters helpfully suggested that Bob Dole of Kansas would make a good target.

But anti-Goldwater journalists got a good bit of help from the candidate himself, whose tendency to shoot from the lip often undercut his own message. Goldwater often unveiled startlingly new policies and ideas in response to a reporter's casual question, inevitably catching his staff unprepared. Sometimes this resulted



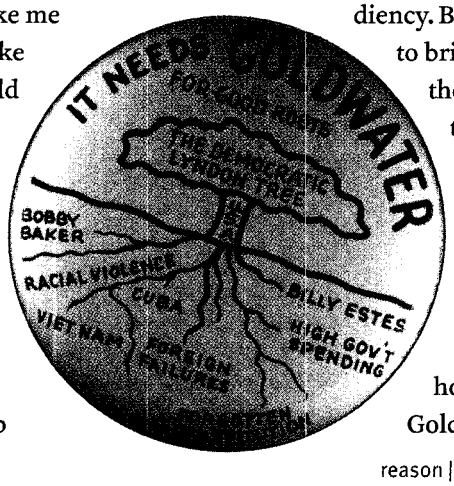
in potentially attractive proposals (like the volunteer army, a Goldwater suggestion that went virtually unnoticed) getting lost in the background noise of the campaign. Other times, the candidate wound up looking like a nut case.

To wit: One of the many earthquakes that rocked the campaign was touched off when Goldwater offhandedly said that Minuteman missiles, one of the mainstays of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, were undependable. When stunned reporters asked *how* undependable, Goldwater airily replied: "That's classified information. But they're not dependable, I can tell you that." In fact, there were a lot of scientists and military men who shared his doubts: Kennedy's nuclear test-ban treaty had gone into effect before the Pentagon got a chance to fire a Minuteman loaded with a nuclear warhead. Nobody really knew if it worked.

Had staffers known Goldwater was going to talk about it, they could have been standing by with fact sheets explaining the background, including names and phone numbers of experts who agreed with him. Moreover, they could have added (as Goldwater had not) that one of his reservations about missiles was that, unlike bombers, they couldn't be called back, making an accidental nuclear exchange much more likely. That point would undoubtedly have played well with the public at a time when the movies *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* were drawing huge audiences. Instead, nobody was prepared, and Goldwater, not for the last time in the campaign, looked mildly loony.

To make matters worse, Goldwater's campaign *did* attract some boosters who seemed barely tethered to planet Earth, from John Birchers who thought Eisenhower was a communist to hardcore racists who praised the murder of civil rights activists. Their zealotry quickly became the stuff of legends. Among the funniest portions of Perlstein's book is his blow-by-blow account of a Young Republicans convention where the pro- and anti-Goldwater forces began by slashing one another's microphone cords and ended by brawling on the speaker's platform. (It's no coincidence, I suspect, that Hillary Clinton's maiden foray into politics was as a Goldwater Girl.) Sometimes Goldwater almost seemed to be running against his own supporters, scolding them in speeches for latching on to particular issues without understanding the underlying philosophy: "I can't help but wondering, sometimes, if you've asked yourselves why my campaign is the way it is."

Nothing was more problematic than the civil rights issue—particularly the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed most forms of racial discrimination. Goldwater was no racist; early in his career as a Phoenix city council member, he aggressively supported local civil rights ordinances. But as his conservatism deepened, he grew first skeptical and then fearful about the use of government for social engineering. "You cannot pass a law that will make me like you—or you like me," Goldwater told one rally. "That is something that can only happen in our hearts." He understood, too, that government-mandated affirmative action was merely the flip side of segregationist racialism: "It reintroduces through the back door the very principle of allocation by race that makes compulsory segregation morally wrong and offensive to freedom." And, that, to Barry Goldwater, was the bottom line. "Our aim, as I understand it, is neither to establish a segregated society nor to establish an integrated society," he said. "It is to preserve a *free* society."



Goldwater was privately appalled to discover that his opposition to the Civil Rights Act rallied to his side not only libertarians but racists who detested and feared not state power but black people. He was horrified when Alabama's racist Gov. George Wallace offered to switch parties and run as his vice president. Goldwater eventually became so paranoid about the influx of racists to his campaign that he worried that a summer riot in Harlem had been secretly instigated by his supporters in hopes of generating a white backlash vote.

In recounting the role that the civil rights controversy played in the election, Perlstein is at his worst. Perlstein, personally charmed by Goldwater (as even many of his deadliest political enemies were), acknowledges that his opposition to the law was based on genuine principle rather than racism or political expediency. But he is unable to bring himself to say the same for any of the millions of people who supported Goldwater. He sympathetically describes Lyndon Johnson shaking his head, wondering how it could be that Goldwater voters

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"seemed willing to turn back the clock on every social gain of the past 30 years—just for the chance to vote *nigger-nigger-nigger*."

Perlstein's disdain for Goldwater's supporters extends well past the civil rights issue. If middle-aged, they're described as balding and paunchy; if young, pimply; but always as kooks and cranks "for whom Goldwater was

Goldwater's fears about the loss of individuality to the madding crowd were on the razor edge of the social debate on America's restless college campuses.

the answer to every question and every conspiracy." In one unwitting aside, Perlstein offers perhaps the most telling critique of modern liberalism I've ever seen. He ridicules a Goldwater supporter whose Boston neighborhood is targeted for destruction by an urban renewal campaign. To Perlstein's smirking amusement, the man has erected a sign in his yard that says, WE SHALL DEFEND OUR HOMES WITH OUR LIVES. It seems that the right of black people to eat at a Woolworth's lunch counter is sacred, while the right of a white working-class man to not have his home torn down by Harvard-trained social engineers is comic-opera buffoonery.

If Perlstein is tone deaf when it comes to the concerns of Americans outside of liberalism's favored classes, he's surprisingly evenhanded when it comes to the issue that haunted Goldwater's campaign more than any other: his supposedly quick trigger finger on foreign policy. Perhaps the most memorable moment of the campaign was the infamous "daisy" commercial produced by Johnson's hardball TV people. The ad opened with a little girl in a field, counting aloud as she picked petals from a daisy. Suddenly the girl looks up, startled; the frame freezes; a man's voice picks up the count, reversing it, *three-two-one*; the freeze-frame cuts away to film of an atomic explosion, the mushroom cloud spreading malignantly across the screen. "Vote for President Johnson on November 3," an announcer intones. "The stakes are too high for you to stay home."

The ad—which ran only once before it was pulled, but lived on endlessly in the resulting controversy—was the subject of bitter complaint by the Goldwater forces, who called it a dirty low blow. The ad was indeed unfair, not so much in implying Goldwater was frighteningly bloodthirsty, but in implying that Democrats were *not*.

Goldwater had surely earned his reputation as a gunslinger with his proposal to use tactical nukes to defoliate Vietnam, his repeated calls to give NATO armies the right to use atomic weapons on their own, and his constant refrain that U.S. strategists shouldn't let fear of nuclear war keep them from standing up to the Soviet Union. But, as Perlstein notes, Goldwater in this case *was* a mere echo of the mainstream foreign policy thinking in the Democratic Party. When it came to the Cold War, the two parties were both unremittingly hawkish. Goldwater's decree that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" was merely the *Reader's Digest* version of Kennedy's Inaugural Day promise that "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

The most white-knuckle act of nuclear brinkmanship in American history was Kennedy's blockade of Cuba during the missile crisis. A close second was his nationally televised 1961 speech in which he bluntly threatened to go to war with the Soviets over Berlin, putting long-range bombers on 15 minutes' alert and warning Americans to start building fallout shelters. Perlstein calls the speech "the most terrifying of

Porous Border

How Mexican migrants change themselves—and the U.S.

Sara Rimensnyder

The annual week-long fiesta in the Mexican Indian village of Cherán dates back to pre-Conquest days. But for the past 330 years, its crowning event has been a traditional Spanish bullfight. Each year, on the morning after the popular event, the Purépecha Indians celebrate Mass, where they fervently pray the rosary. Then they make offerings to the harvest god, muttering prayers in Purépecha as a statue of St. Francis and a Catholic priest look on.

"Thus," writes Ruben Martinez in his new book, *Crossroads: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (Metropolitan), "the pre-Columbian symbol of the harvest god who decides whether to make the earth fertile takes its place on the altar alongside the man from Assisi."

In his warm and compelling account, Martinez spins a fascinating story of cultural evolution as he follows several migrant families from Cherán, a rural village in the southern state of Michoacán. His migrant heroes share a common trait: Like their ancestors, who forged the syncretic pagan Catholicism that survives today, the migrants negotiate the cultural and economic influence of the United States with a distinct sense of autonomy. As they move back and forth »

the Cold War" and adds: "Later Barry Goldwater would say the same kinds of things during the 1964 presidential campaign, and people would call him a madman."

Perlstein is equally merciless when it comes to Vietnam. Goldwater, he notes, insistently and correctly argued that Kennedy and Johnson had gotten the United States far more deeply involved than anyone realized, that we were sliding into an impossible "defensive war" that neither Congress nor the American public had ever authorized. Johnson replied, straight-faced, with the most notorious lie in the history of American politics: "We are not going to send American boys nine or 10 thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves." As he spoke, his best and brightest advisors were putting the finishing touches on a deployment plan that would have nearly 200,000 American soldiers in Vietnam within a year.

Of course, on Election Day in 1964, Johnson won 43 million votes to Goldwater's 27 million. Perlstein takes unholy delight in quoting the post-mortems in which the usual gang of Washington idiots, from Scotty Reston to Arthur Schlesinger, pronounced the Republican Party officially dead and the Goldwaterites banished to the wilderness. They were absurdly, comically wrong. It didn't take long for Americans to recognize that Goldwater had been right about Vietnam (it was a war) and civil rights (you really couldn't make people like each other by passing a law). The GOP made a strong showing in the 1966 congressional elections and retook the presidency in 1968. In 1980, Ronald Reagan, who first emerged as a national political figure with a wildly popular nationally televised pro-Goldwater speech in the final days of the '64 campaign, would be elected president.

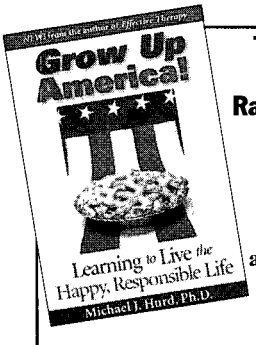
There was one strain of the Republican Party banished into the wilderness after 1964—the patrician Eastern liberals that Goldwater so despised. (Though the controversy over the martyr act of Vermont Sen. James Jeffords last year shows that a few tattered survivors still remain, like Japanese soldiers holed up in the caves of the Philippines.) The two currents that Goldwater brought into the party, the libertarians and the Southerners, coexist uneasily. If there were any doubt in which of them Goldwater himself felt more at home, it was resolved when he famously suggested that Republicans ought to "kick Jerry Falwell right in the ass."

Perlstein, surveying all this nearly four decades later, concludes: "Here is one time, at least, in which history was written by the losers." If only. It's fair to say that Goldwater won a permanent place in America's political debate for libertarian ideas. But few of them have triumphed. Taxes consume a higher percentage of national income than ever, and George W. Bush managed to pass a tax cut last year only with the Keynesian argument that it would stimulate a lagging economy, not because hundreds of congressmen started sporting TAXATION IS THEFT buttons.

The drug war has become the new Vietnam, consuming an ever-larger share of resources and lives. New groups demanding entitlements disguised as civil rights, from nonsmokers to the handicapped, pop up with depressing regularity. Even the Reagan Revolution was mostly imaginary. The Energy and Education Departments are still standing, and federal expenditures and the federal deficit climbed steadily throughout his administration. Even the much-ballyhooed reductions in force in the Washington bureaucracy during Reagan's first year in office amounted to less than four-tenths of a percent of the federal workforce and were quickly swallowed up by new hiring.

What we really wound up with was not history written by libertarians, but the acid punch line of a joke that made the rounds in 1966: They told me that if I voted for Goldwater, we'd have a war in Southeast Asia, civil and racial unrest, and a ruined economy. I went ahead and voted for him anyway, and it turned out they were absolutely right. ◧

Contributing Editor Glenn Garvin is television critic at the Miami Herald.



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Spy Watch

Behind closed doors at the National Security Agency

Michael Young

Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency From the Cold War Through the Dawn of a New Century, by James Bamford, New York: Doubleday, 721 pages, $29.95

OSAMA BIN LADEN is a dutiful stepson. This mundane bit of information took on particular importance following the September 11 attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. As James Bamford reminds us in *Body of Secrets*, his latest book on the shadowy National Security Agency (NSA), officials at the organization would routinely play intercepted telephone conversations between bin Laden and his stepmother to congressmen in order to acquire more funds for eavesdropping activities.

As Bamford could not have known when he wrote his book, the passage highlights what is both right and wrong in America's reliance on communications intelligence. One such call, taped in early September, allegedly constitutes part of the evidence that bin Laden was involved in the mass homicides in Washington and New York. At the same time, the United States, despite its ability to listen in on its arch foe, was unable to prevent the attacks from taking place, underscoring the chasm between the NSA's technological prowess and the intelligence community's capacity to absorb, analyze, and act on information gleaned.

The NSA was formally established on October 24, 1952, to replace the shaky and ineffective Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA). The United States had begun collecting signals intelligence (or Sigint) before World War II, but had avoided creating a single authority to handle it all. Instead, the armed forces services collected Sigint separately, and even when the AFSA was set up to combine these efforts, the services maintained control over their specific code breaking and intercept activities. This fragmentation proved catastrophic during the Korean War—the North Korean invasion took the U.S. completely by surprise—and led to the NSA's urgent creation. Though the agency reports to the secretary of defense, it became early on a semi-sovereign entity.

The NSA is the largest of the U.S. intelligence agencies, with a staff of some 38,000 people, an additional 25,000 non-staff personnel in listening posts, and an annual budget estimated at $7.3 billion. It is headquartered in an enormous complex known by some agency employees as Crypto City, located off the Baltimore-Washington Parkway near Annapolis Junction in Maryland. The atmosphere there is reminiscent of the Polish science fiction novelist Stanislaw Lem's outlandish The Building in his *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub* (1971), where spies search for secret meanings in Shakespeare and one character exclaims, "A cracked code remains a code. An expert can peel away layer after layer. It's inexhaustible. One digs ever deeper into more and more inaccessible strata. That journey has no end."

To Bamford's credit, he single-handedly has done a considerable share of excavation into the NSA's inaccessible strata. He first did so in his much-acclaimed *The Puzzle Palace* (1982). The numerous government documents he managed to obtain for *Body of Secrets* confirm the earlier book's underlying premise: The NSA is both a remarkable and disquieting embodiment of the awesome power of the American government. While Bamford never draws explicit political conclusions from this observation, he is acutely sensitive to the illegal behavior an institution like the NSA can help generate. Granted partial access to NSA officials, he is also rarely taken in by his subject or sources, constantly playing off inconsistencies in quotes by some agency members against those from others. This is lauded

over the border, mostly illegally, they're defying much more than U.S. immigration officials. They're also flouting traditional notions of citizenship and national culture, reinventing themselves and their communities, new and old, in the pursuit of a better life.

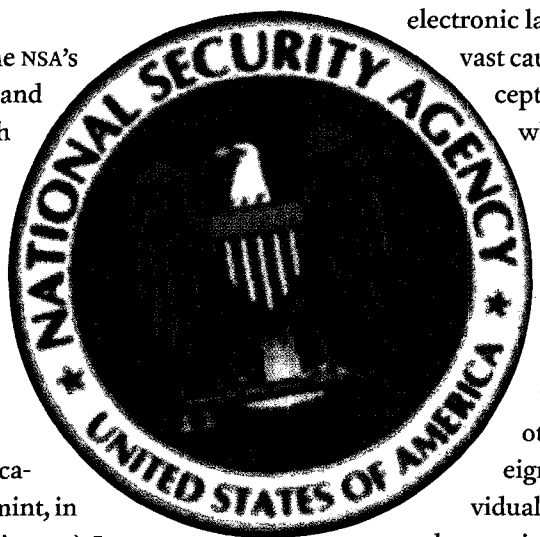
Take the case of Dante Cerano, an Indian disc jockey on state-sponsored radio who organizes rock concerts in Cherán. Though Cerano's not a migrant, Martinez calls him the "embodiment of the clashing and melding that define Purépecha identity in the twenty-first century." Cerano speaks perfect Purépecha and Mexican with hints of urban slang picked up in Mexico City. He wants to play rock 'n' roll on the radio, but the cultural authorities have decided the airwaves should be used to preserve traditional folk music, not to blast U.S.-influenced rock.

To Cerano, both music and migration are rebellion from such authority. By working in the United States, he tells Martinez, Purépecha Indians "improve the material conditions of their lives and also transform their culture. Through culture, people create their identity, their sense of place in the world; they tell their own stories with the aesthetic of their choosing."

That sensibility is keenly in evidence throughout *Crossroads* and on both sides of the border. Martinez writes, for instance, of the Enríquez family in Norwalk, Wisconsin, who celebrate a baptism and »

able when one has been provided unique information, as Bamford was, on an ultra-secretive organization—one increasingly conscious, however, of the advantages of partial transparency after decades of stony silence.

One of Bamford's most damning accusations is that the NSA failed to do what it was mainly designed to do: break high-level Soviet ciphers. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the U.S. Sigint effort had some sterling successes. A team of experts, known collectively by the codename TICOM, was able to get hold of the USSR's "Fish" cipher machine, one of which had been captured by the Germans, and therefore read Soviet communications. The system worked until 1948 when, overnight, the USSR's encrypted lines went dead. (An AFSA linguist, William Weisband, was suspected of having warned Moscow, but he was never convicted.)



The array of the NSA's duties is vast and complex. Though high-level Russian codes remained unbroken, the NSA had greater success penetrating and unscrambling Soviet communications traffic (Comint, in the professional jargon). It also gathered much vital electronic intelligence, or Elint, meaning those signals put out by radar, missiles, and other devices. When the Cold War ended, the NSA shifted its focus away from the former Soviet Union. Though the NSA eavesdropped on most countries from the moment it began operating, the agency's principal mission had changed by the mid-1990s and it spent most of its time listening in on friendly states and allies.

Some allies would prove to be more equal than others. One of the peculiar byproducts of the NSA's activities was the formation of an Anglo-Saxon fraternity of snoops, UKUSA, named for a communications intelligence agreement originally signed between the NSA and its British counterpart. The grouping, which now includes the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, is sometimes inaccurately known as Echelon, for the software program integrating the Sigint capabilities of the member states.

As Bamford writes, the idea behind Echelon was that "agencies would be able to submit targets to one another's listening posts and, likewise, everyone would be allowed to share in the take—to dip their electronic ladles into the vast cauldron of intercepts and select what they liked." Bamford doesn't take kindly to this invasion of the privacy of others, whether the others are foreign states or individuals. He discerns threatening patterns that can, in extreme cases, have a nefarious impact on domestic American life. The NSA is legally barred from spying within the continental United States, or even, in most cases, on American citizens. Nevertheless, it has on numerous occasions engaged in domestic surveillance, leading in one noted case in the late 1990s to the arrest of Nasser Ahmad, an Egyptian immigrant, and his detention in solitary confinement for three years. Only when Ahmad was finally allowed to see a portion of the secret evidence against him was he able to gain his release.

Such misuse of power has always lurked in the NSA's past, even as elected officials have tried to expand its legal range of activities. Richard Nixon, for instance, tried to empower the NSA to spy inside the U.S. (The effort was derailed by, of all people, J. Edgar Hoover, who didn't want anyone competing with the FBI.) Yet one of the most infamous examples of political manipulation by a branch of the U.S. government did not directly involve the NSA. Bamford wisely includes a discussion of the benignly named Operation Northwoods. He suggests that the political system that could spawn the NSA was also one that could take the mania with communism to the repulsive extremes revealed by that scheme.

Northwoods was a secret and illegal plan drawn up by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, chaired by Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, during the Kennedy administration. Bamford succeeds in showing that all those '60s and '70s films about generals with a screw loose and a taste for Armageddon weren't entirely fictional. The idea was to provoke violent incidents inside the United States, including murders, bombings, and hijackings, that could then be pinned on Cuba, thus justifying military action to overthrow Fidel Castro. Northwoods was ultimately rejected by Kennedy's defense secretary, Robert McNamara, but the fact that the plan could have reached the upper echelons of the administration reveals that Kennedy's top brass felt

the president could stomach considerable misconduct.

Like all bureaucracies, the NSA is in perpetual search of more funding to generate ever-larger amounts of information with less and less practical use. To be fair, it is not the NSA's brief to analyze what it accumulates—that is the role of the CIA and various government departments, and their respective intelligence arms. In the past, notably during the Vietnam War, the agency's fine intelligence was simply ignored by those to whom it was directed, most prominently Gen. William Westmoreland. (The NSA warned, for example, of the 1968 Tet Offensive.) The problem is that the volume of information gathered by the NSA today far outreaches the intelligence community's capability to process it. As former CIA director Robert Gates put it: "Sometimes I think we just collect intelligence for the thrill of collecting it....We have the capacity to collect mountains of data that we can never analyze. We just stack it up."

From a former CIA director: "Sometimes I think we just collect intelligence for the thrill of collecting it."

Despite the NSA's colossal budget and its tendency toward information overkill, the agency's deputy director for services, Terry Thompson, could complain in 1999: "One of the reasons we don't get more support on the Hill for the budget is that we don't have a strong lobby in the defense industry....We spend our money on four hundred or four thousand different contracts and it's hard to get a critical mass of people who want to go down and wave the flag for NSA when budget deliberations are going on." Thompson was speaking in the wake of successive budget cuts at the NSA, so perhaps he had a point. But then one gets a distinct sense that he would consider any amount of money for the NSA to be somehow too little.

Whatever its faults, the NSA has suffered a fair share of casualties in its relatively short history. The most costly episode, which Bamford describes in detail, was the Israeli attack against the NSA spy ship, *USS Liberty*, off the Sinai Peninsula during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The *Liberty* incident led to the death of 35 crew members, but was long ago swept under the rug of U.S.-Israeli relations. Bamford tears down the official explanation, that it was all an accident. He writes that NSA officials with access to secret intercepts from the episode "were virtually unanimous in their belief that the attack was deliberate." *Liberty* crew members noted that during the attack, the Israelis first went after the ship's communications apparatus, which required knowledge of its makeup. According to intercepted radio traffic, the Israelis positively identified the *Liberty* and the markings painted on the ship's side. In contrast, the attacking airplanes were unmarked, undermining the Israeli claim that their pilots confused the *Liberty* with an Egyptian vessel, one that they, incidentally, knew to be much slower than the moving U.S. ship. Bamford's hypothesis is that the *Liberty* recorded radio communications between Israeli units discussing the extensive execution of Egyptian prisoners-of-war. He believes the Israelis sought to destroy the ship to cover up their war crimes.

Some have questioned Bamford's allegation. For example, *New York Times* reviewer James Finder disingenuously wrote that the Egyptian POW theory was based on slender evidence, and mentioned a single Israeli journalist as Bamford's source. In fact Bamford cites three sources, all Israelis. One of them was a participant in the attack and another was an eyewitness. The third, an Israeli military historian, concluded (on the basis of interviews with dozens of soldiers who themselves had killed prisstartle their neighbors by inviting them to slaughter, roast, and eat a pig. Back in Cherán, two- and even three-story houses built with dollars earned in American fields and factories are topped with satellite dishes and, during the holidays, Christmas lights. American football and basketball jerseys are coveted possessions, hip-hop music blares from pickup trucks, and men in the cantinas make themselves into legends with tales of their adventures up North. And though the migrants spend much of the year in the United States, and sometimes settle there permanently, most return at least annually for the week-long fiesta.

To be sure, the migrant lifestyle carries with it many sacrifices, and Martinez details the considerable emotional and social strain of families who spend much of the year apart. While traveling for work is nothing new—for Mexicans, Americans, or any other group—the ability to stay in touch with the homeland has greatly increased in recent years. Through cheap long-distance phone service and air travel, satellite TV, and the Internet, Mexican migrants have managed to escape at least some of the boundaries of time and place.

The one great exception to this is the U.S. border. With every crossing, families fear their loved ones won't make it. Martinez himself is first drawn to Cherán because he's moved by the grim story of three »

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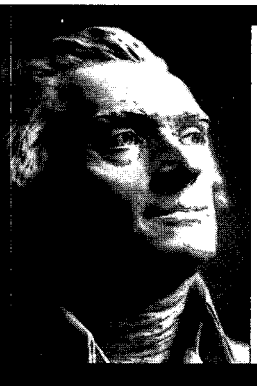

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oners) that as many as 1,000 Egyptians were shot. Bamford's argument is surely plausible, as anyone who has surveyed a half-century of Israel's wartime behavior will admit. The only part of Bamford's theory that is dubious—and here Finder's protest is in order—is that it would have been foolish for Israel to cover up one massacre by another. Yet where Finder sees this as evidence of Israeli blamelessness, readers will conclude that an explanation for the undeniably deliberate assault must lie elsewhere.

The last two chapters of *Body of Secrets* are devoted to detailed descriptions of Crypto City, of life at the NSA, and of past progress in the organization's successive supercomputer programs. Those parts don't make for particularly compelling reading, but they represent a major accomplishment, since Bamford is the first reporter to ferret out such details, which have been secret for decades. Published in a year when the U.S. Congress sought—and then postponed—passage of an official secrets act that would have criminalized the unauthorized disclosure of any type of classified information by federal employees, *Body of Secrets* is a valuable reminder of the enduring siren song of concealment, the enemy of all true democracies.

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brothers from the village. Their race from U.S. border agents while crossing illegally ended in a fatal car wreck.

One great insight in *Crossroads* is that however militarized the border may become, Mexicans will find a way across. It remains, in the end, a fundamentally arbitrary barrier, and hence one that will be ignored. That's an important understanding to apply to culture as well, since every migrant who crosses the border further erodes the false notion of two homogenous, walled-off cultures. More than ever, culture and identity create constantly shifting borders.

Though such a world of relentless mixing frightens many, it's the inevitable result of people striving to improve their lives on their own terms. Martinez sums it up well: "In the end, the joke will be on both the gringo and the Mexican guardians of reified notions of culture. The kids will be neither Mexican nor gringo but both, and more than both, they will be the new Americans, imbibing cultures from all over the globe." ◻

Sara Rimensnyder (sarar@reason.com) is **reason***'s assistant editor.*

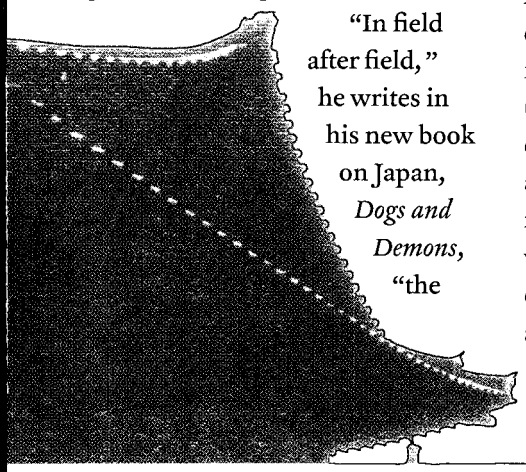
Tales from the Dark Side

Divining the causes of Japan's economic nightmare

Charles Oliver

Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Japan, by Alex Kerr, New York: Hill & Wang, 432 pages, $27

IN THE ANCIENT Chinese philosophical text *Han Feizi*, the emperor asks a painter which subjects are the hardest and easiest to depict. "Dogs and horses are difficult," the artist says. "Demons and goblins are easy." In other words, the simple, everyday things are hard to get right; it's much easier to come up with big, eye-catching monstrosities. Alex Kerr, a longtime resident of Japan and author of the acclaimed *Lost Japan* (1996) believes that nation suffers from a severe case of "dogs and demons." Thanks to ossified and inefficient financial and political institutions, Japan has created all manner of monstrous projects and fiscal outcomes while failing to create the conditions necessary for economic growth. The result: The country that inspired all manner of economic envy and inspiration in Americans 15 years ago now inspires something else.



"In field after field," he writes in his new book on Japan, *Dogs and Demons*, "the bureaucracy dreams up lavish monuments rather than attend to long-term underlying problems." Kerr traces these problems to both political and cultural sources. The first, familiar to economists from the public choice school of analysis, is the tendency of bureaucracies to expand and defend their turf. Government agencies keep on spending money, building new projects, and finding new excuses to continue long after their original purpose has faded.

But culture plays a major role, too, Kerr argues. Japanese are taught from birth not to question authority, to fit in with the group. That leaves bureaucrats without much serious opposition, and explains why Japan has failed to address problems that are behind an economic malaise that has lasted more than a decade. Kerr is pessimistic that Japan can change before things get much, much worse. With the United States now facing its own serious economic problems, it is worth looking at Japan once again, this time as an example of what to avoid.

At the heart of Japan's economic problems—stagnant growth and a growing irrelevance in the world economy—is a banking system that no longer works. The government says that Japanese banks have some $400 billion in bad loans on their books. Adjusting for the size of the economies, that would make Japan's debt problem four times worse than the U.S. savings-and-loan crisis of a decade ago. However, many economists believe that Japan's bad debts are actually far higher, and may total more than $1 trillion. (It's difficult to get a grasp on just how large the debt problem is because banks use all sorts of accounting tricks to mask bad loans.) Most—if not all—of Japan's banks are technically insolvent. They can't lend enough money to keep the economy growing. Even if they could, there just aren't enough good borrowers out there to make a difference.

How did Japan reach such a state? "Japan's financial system rests on bureaucratic fiat," Kerr writes. The system was set up to pump cheap

capital into the business sector. Banks rarely called in bad loans; companies were encouraged to borrow and expand continuously. "A company would borrow against assets such as land, and then reinvest the money in the stock market. The market would rise, and thus the company would have 'latent profits' against which to borrow more money, with which to buy more land. And on to the next round," according to Kerr.

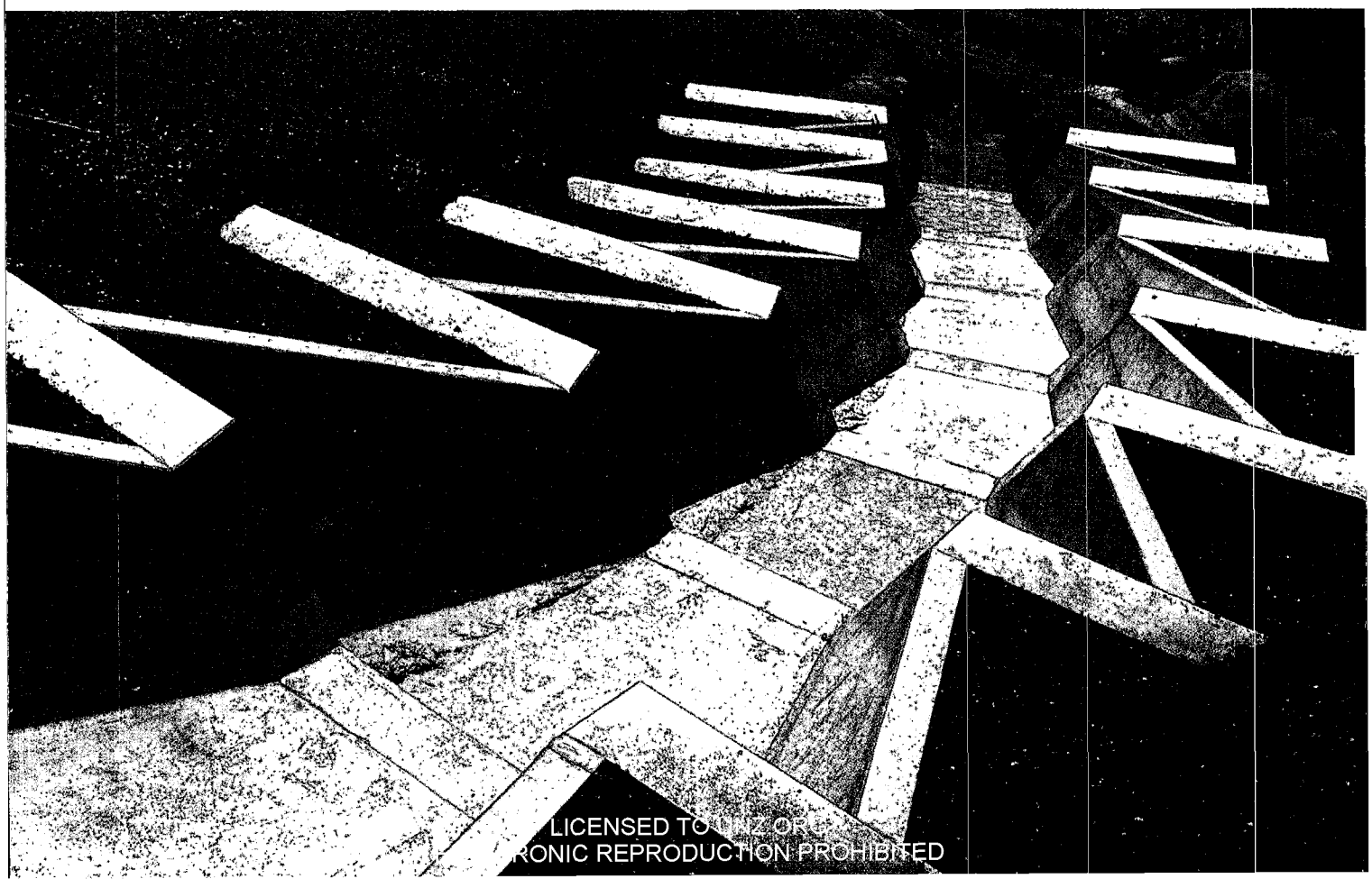
Those cycles created huge real estate and stock market bubbles. But those trends couldn't be sustained forever. The bubbles burst in 1989, after the Bank of Japan raised interest rates, slashing liquidity growth and making it impossible for banks to keep pushing money out the door. The crash left banks with a mountain of bad loans. But they didn't call those loans in—that would have meant liquidating companies (and admitting that the "asset" of those loans was in fact worthless, bringing the bank's solvency officially in question). In fact, they often continued to make loans to those very same companies, piling up more bad debts.

Why? The government was reluctant to push through the sort of housecleaning that the United States went through in its S&L crisis. The much-reviled Resolution Trust Corporation stripped bad assets from the books of S&Ls and liquidated them. At the same time, it pumped money into the system to bail out depositors at the failed S&Ls. But Kerr says there are deeper forces at work in Japan. "Traditionalists hold the hallowed word *Wa* (peace, or harmony) as Japan's ultimate ideal, even going so far as to use Wa as an alternate name for Japan itself," he writes.

In a nation where harmony is the supreme value, no one is willing to strike a discordant note. Banks are reluctant to call in bad loans. The government is reluctant to force them to. It's better to paper over the system and ignore problems than it is to call attention to them and fix them. In effect, the search for Wa ends up rationalizing a lot of inefficiency and outright corruption. (Kerr reveals that some police departments actually have manuals detailing how to cover up embarrassing events.)

If the government isn't addressing the nation's economic woes, what is it doing? Well, for one thing, it is paving over most of the nation. Japan devotes 9 percent of its gross domestic product to public works. By contrast the United States spends just 1 percent of GDP on public works.

> "The colossal subsidies flowing to construction mean that the



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combined national budget devotes an astounding 40 percent of expenditures to public works (versus 8 to 10 percent in the United States and 4 to 6 percent in Britain and France)," Kerr writes. Construction accounts for 10 percent of all Japanese jobs, more than double the share in the United States or Western Europe. What keeps the system going? Graft. Some 1 to 3 percent of the budget of each public works project gets kicked back to the politicians who arrange it. Nor is that the end of the corruption.

"The system works like this: the River Bureau of the Construction Ministry builds a dam, then hands its operation over to an agency called the Water Resources Public Corporation (WRPC), many of whose directors are retired officials of the River Bureau. The WRPC, in turn, with no open bidding, subcontracts the work to a company called Friends of the Rivers, a very profitable arrangement for the WRPC's directors, since they own 90 percent of the company's stock," Kerr writes.

The River Bureau has dammed or diverted all but three of the nation's 113 major rivers. The government has honeycombed mountains with thousands of miles of virtually unused highways. It has covered more than 60 percent of its coastline with cement. Government programs have caused almost half of Japan's woodlands to be cleared and replanted with a monoculture of cedar. The results of 50 years of a construction state, Kerr believes, are that "Japan has become arguably the world's ugliest country."

If the countryside has been laid waste, cities and towns are no more attractive. Cities small and large are dotted with ugly, unused cultural centers, concert halls, and museums. Japanese architects' political connections matter more than their skill. They no longer have to design buildings that either serve a function or please the eye of anyone other than the architect.

As a result, Japanese architecture is dominated by two schools: *manga* and massive. The latter is self-explanatory. Buildings impress by their sheer size. The manga style refers to Japan's comic books. Structures in this style are known for their curious shapes, odd materials, and garish colors. Lately, the two schools have begun to merge. While cities are rushing to build cultural centers no one will ever use, they are ignoring simple steps that could make Japanese cities more beautiful, such as burying power lines.

Wa, the culture of harmony, built the system, and is also the reason that the Japanese put up with the system. The first lesson Japanese school children learn, according to Kerr, is to move in unison. Literally. He writes that in Japanese kindergartens playtime is strictly regulated. The children do the same exercises, run in the same direction. Spontaneity is frowned upon.

The second lesson taught by Japanese schools is that it is a crime to be different. Kids routinely ostracize and haze those who are too bright or too dumb, too fat or too thin, too short or too tall. The hazings have even sometimes resulted in death. But it's all accepted, often encouraged, by authorities.

In terms of instruction, schools concentrate on rote memorization. This process produces literate, obedient people. But it doesn't produce a lot of creative, independent people, Kerr says. Japanese students "have not been taught analytical thinking, the ability to ask unusual or creative questions, a sense of brotherhood with the rest of mankind or curiosity about and love for the natural environment," he writes. These traits actually served Japan well, for a time. The nation set its mind on one goal—becoming an industrial powerhouse. The banking system funneled money to the great manufacturing concerns. The school system turned out millions of hard-working, obedient workers. But once this train was set in motion, it became impossible to stop or even to alter its course.

In Japanese kindergartens playtime is strictly regulated. The children do the same exercises, run in the same direction. Spontaneity is frowned upon.

Institutions that should help correct Japan's problems don't seem to have much effect. Japan has a nominally free press, but the government and businesses restrict information by providing it only to members of tightly controlled press clubs. Reporters or media outlets that offend bureaucrats or top business officials run the risk of losing their access to any information.

Meanwhile, opposition politicians have little power to sway things. This is due partly to the fact that the Liberal Democratic Party has controlled the government for so long. Opposition parties just don't have much power to oppose change. Also aiding the seemingly unstoppable momentum of Japanese policies is the fact that elected politicians of any party have little influence over the bureau-

crats. Politicians come and go, but the bureaucracies remain. And of course, Wa continues to be a strong cultural impediment toward speaking out or advocating big change.

Those are lessons worth remembering as the United States lays in for a long "war on terror." All around us are calls for unity and bipartisanship and strengthening the hand of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other government agencies. The Japanese system doesn't crush all individualists, of course. But those who survive the system often emigrate to other countries, where their open minds are more appreciated. Those individualists who stay find themselves marginalized.

"In spite of the pressure for conformity, there is a generation of adventurous young Japanese who are well aware of what will be needed to compete in the big wide world. The question is whether there will be enough of them to make a difference," Kerr writes.

Kerr's book went to press before Junichiro Koizumi became prime minister in April 2001. Koizumi promised sweeping reforms to jumpstart the economy. He took direct aim at the troubled banking system, promising to force banks to write off bad debt at last. It was the sort of plan that Western economists had long urged. Koizumi's popularity ratings were very high, and there was a great deal of hope that he could finally make the changes that Japan needs.

But Koizumi's popularity, it seems, was more predicated on his hairstyle, his clothes, and his general status as a maverick than on his specific proposals. He has had to battle members of his own party as well as the massive Japanese bureaucracy. Koizumi's reforms are stalled, perhaps already dead. Kerr is probably not surprised.

So what happens to Japan? It's still the world's second-largest economy. It still has a hard-working labor force. It could continue to muddle along for a long time. But the longer it goes without real economic growth, the less relevant Japan becomes and the less wealthy it becomes. In the 1930s, Argentina was one of the world's wealthiest nations. Decades of bad government policies reduced the country to Third World status. Perhaps a similar fate awaits a Japan already bedeviled by its demons. ■

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Hollywood's Second Sex

Women and the movies

Steve Kurtz

Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood, by Mick LaSalle, New York: St. Martin's Press, 293 pages, $25.95

Fast-Talking Dames, by Maria DiBattista, New Haven: Yale University Press, 365 pages, $27.95

Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir, by Eddie Muller, New York: HarperCollins, 292 pages, $29.95

A CURIOUS PROBLEM arose while filming the 1948 noir classic *Force of Evil*. Director Abraham Polonsky wanted a traveling shot that followed female lead Marie Windsor as she sauntered up to star John Garfield. But at 5'9", Windsor was three inches taller than Garfield. What to do? Marie herself came up with a solution as bizarre as the problem: Once her legs were out of camera range, she'd bend at the knees until she reached an acceptable height. Even a progressive like Polonsky (who, for Cold War reasons, was prevented from making another film for 21 years) accepted the rule that a female love interest couldn't tower over her man.

There have been many rules, written and unwritten, that determined how women could look and act in Hollywood movies. Often these rules were what the audience—men *and* women—wanted, but nearly as often they were behind the times, failing to reflect social change or even give the audience what it was prepared to accept. Three recently published books discuss, with little overlap, how women were portrayed on the silver screen from the mid-1920s to the 1950s. Mick LaSalle's *Complicated Women* tries to rehabilitate the pictures made in the freewheeling pre-Code era, i.e., before Joseph Breen took over the Production Code Administration in July 1934 and transformed moviemaking. Maria DiBattista's *Fast-Talking Dames* looks at the romantic comedies of the 1930s (mostly post-Code) and early 1940s, when women, DiBattista argues, matched or surpassed their male co-stars in wit. After the war come the *Dark City Dames*, as Eddie Muller calls them, of film noir. All three authors make strong cases on behalf of their period while demeaning what was to come later, and all are sometimes blind to the flaws of the era they are celebrating.

LaSalle, film critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, begins his account in the transitional decade of the 1920s, when the most popular screen images of women were the voracious vamp and the innocent ingenue. Women had just been given the vote, and the country was becoming more urbanized, more sophisticated, and, with Prohibition, less law-abiding. Hollywood took a few years to catch on to the changes, but by the middle of the decade there was a new kind of woman, one who could break the rules—at least some of them—and get away with it. Girls who just wanted to have fun.

LaSalle identifies two aspects of this new woman. One was embodied by the ethereal Greta Garbo, living life at too intense a level, willing literally to die for love. The other was portrayed by Norma Shearer, a woman of flesh and blood who was willing to live for love, and live on her own terms.

Garbo maintains her mystique, but time has been less kind to Shearer. LaSalle wants to fix that. He makes a solid case that she's unfairly remembered for her post-Code parts, such as her most famous role as the too-decent Mary Haines in *The Women* (1939). Actually, she made many movies in the 1920s and early 1930s portraying much wilder types. She's also remembered as MGM mogul Irving Thalberg's wife, with the implication she got ahead by sleeping with the boss. In fact, she was a star before she married.

LaSalle also discusses such pre- »

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Burning Sensations

How would-be censors promote free speech

By Jeremy Lott

In December, just as author J.K. Rowling—the world's most famous living single mother—was about to be made an honest woman again, New Mexico pastor Jack Brock announced a most generous and unlikely wedding present. Brock, the leader of the Alamogordo Christ Community Church, scheduled a "holy bonfire" of all his congregants' Harry Potter books for December 30. The popular novels about a boy wizard, the 74-year-old parson told Reuters, "are an abomination to God and to me" and are liable to "destroy the lives of many young people." His Christmas Eve sermon asked the tough question, "Baby Jesus or Harry Potter?"

Rowling, a member in good standing of the Church of Scotland, declined to comment. But one suspects that the she had to suppress a chuckle when she thought of all those kids sneaking out to buy new copies of the destroyed contraband.

Some fundamentalists cheered the Rev. Brock's efforts to burn Harry Potter and other suspect works. More commonly, however, they and their more moderate co-religionists winced. Certainly, the overwhelming majority of residents in Alamogordo (population: 30,000) were mortified, as their town was inundated with mass media scrutiny of the least flattering sort. In the end, more than a dozen big press outfits, including the Associated Press, CNN, and the BBC, showed up to cover the spectacle. As an annoyed reader wrote to the local paper of record, the *Alamogordo Daily News*, "There's nothing better than showing the entire state that blind ignorance is alive somewhere in [our town]." In the suddenly lively letters page of the *Daily News*, opinion ran heavily, if not quite unanimously, against the book burning, with Brock and his flock routinely compared to the Nazis and Osama bin Laden.

Upward of 800 demonstrators—including a coalition of Unitarians, Pagans, Democrats, Methodists, Presbyterians, and one Adolf Hitler impersonator—protested the wanton destruction of best-selling literature. (Other items burned included J.R.R. Tolkein novels and the works of Shakespeare.) As the 400 members of the Christ Community Church put flame to paper in a private ceremony, one agitator held up a sandwich board sign that read "'God' hates book burners," and another claimed to have surreptitiously saved a Stephen King novel from the flames.

Many of the demonstrators said that the book burning reminded them of *Fahrenheit 451*, the Taliban's destruction of ancient Buddha statues, and similar acts of cultural repression. The protesters could draw on a long, sad string of historic precedents by which to denounce the event. Even John Calvin, that great exponent of Christian liberty, famously forced his godless opponents to burn their own books publicly in order to escape execution.

But to characterize the book burning as a serious threat to free expression, as several demonstrators and many outside commentators did, is to misunderstand completely how such actions resonate in contemporary America. The United States has certain features built into its legal framework, including theoretically inviolable property rights and freedoms of speech and the press, that make it very difficult for would-be Ayatollahs to coerce the rejection of certain writings or ideas.

Granted, the Constitution also guarantees freedom of religion; but these mechanisms force religion to bend in such a way that, in effect, the pastors propose and the congregations dispose. Brock himself acknowledged this, writing in a church newsletter that "if you do not feel led to participate in tonight's [book burning], then please do not feel condemned or excluded, just follow God's leading for your family."

Worse (from Brock's perspective, at least), civic habits have collided with technology to create an automatic response to any hint of censorship. When a concerned citizen takes it upon himself to publicly burn books, it invites press coverage. Which, in turn, invites outraged charges of "censorship" by enlightened souls everywhere. Which, in turn, invites more press coverage—and on and on.

The upshot is inevitably an outcome similar to the one in New Mexico in December: disproportionate protest and ridicule for the burners, bigger sales and near immortality for the targeted book. The work, whatever its merits, automatically joins the American Library Association's coveted list of "challenged and banned books," ensuring that it will be stocked and read well into the next century.

Which for an author is a far more thoughtful wedding gift than a crockpot or place setting. ▮

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Gerald Moore

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"GOD" HATES BOOK-BURNERS
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SHAME ON OUR TOWN

Code women as Ann Harding, Miriam Hopkins, Constance Bennett, and Glenda Farrell. These one-time stars made movies that weren't just "women's" pictures; they were for everyone. They featured plots where a woman would choose a lover over a husband, or sell herself to get what she wants, or shoot someone who was in her way—and not be punished by the final frame. What happened to change it all? According to LaSalle, the Production Code. The Code, writes LaSalle, "ensured a miserable fate—or at least a rueful, chastened one—for any woman who stepped out of line."

In the aftermath of the 1922 Fatty Arbuckle sex-and-death scandal, nervous Hollywood producers installed a former postmaster general named Will Hays to "clean up" the movies. That was mostly just a public relations gambit to fend off censorship. By 1930, however, the notorious Production Code was created to guide film content. Originally, the Code was enforced by men who sided with the studios in their battles with state censorship boards. But in 1934, studio heads became frightened by threatened boycotts (and threatened federal censorship) and revamped the system. On July 1, Joseph Breen became chief morals enforcer.

Breen was not interested in protecting the studios and had little love for the art form—he was there to protect America from purveyors of filth. It didn't help that he was an anti-Semite and that Jews ran most of the studios. (LaSalle gives ample evidence of Breen's feelings about the studio bosses, quoting from private correspondence. Breen called Hollywood Jews "a vile bunch of people" and "the scum of the earth" and referred to Jewish moguls as "lice" and "crazed with sex.") Once Breen took over, not a single film would be released until it passed the harsh strictures of the Production Code. To LaSalle, this was the end of paradise.

He makes a persuasive case. There's a myth that the Code didn't hurt movies—that it even improved them as filmmakers came up with clever ways to get around the rules. In fact, the Code only made it tougher to produce good films—whole genres and careers were destroyed, while well-written scripts were heavily cut or disallowed outright. The Code wasn't simply about getting rid of naughty words or translucent costumes. Breen saw immorality hiding behind the most innocent tales; some ideas, he felt, simply couldn't be expressed in any form. Popular novels and Broadway hits were gutted, if they could be adapted for film at all. Studios even needed permission to re-release old hits, and the Breen office would often hack them up first. (These edits are still in many prints today.) Sometimes, Breen would be so offended by a movie, such as Ernst Lubitsch's pre-Code classic *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), that he refused to let it be shown.

Above all, the Code came down hard on women, who had been having too good a time. Indeed, a prime reason for the Code was to put women back in their place. The good "bad" woman who had been delighting audiences simply disappeared. Women were no longer to be as independent or free. LaSalle gives a useful illustration: *Mary Stevens, M.D.* (1933) ends with Kay Francis affirming her place as both a woman and a professional, while *The Flame Within* (1935) ends with Ann Harding renouncing her career as a psychiatrist to marry a man who doesn't approve of her working.

LaSalle's fine book, both chatty and informative, demonstrates that there was something lost in Hollywood films for over three decades. Not only were such issues as race relations almost never dealt with, but when Hollywood did attempt to take on something controversial, the storytelling was usually neutered and the result often frustrating.

Who knows how many great lines, memorable scenes, exciting plots, intriguing themes, and promising careers were extinguished because of the Code? LaSalle surveys some of the wreckage. Many of his favorite performers were ruined, and the women who did survive had to play galling scenes at the end of countless films where they'd knuckle under to male domination. That's why, to LaSalle, rediscovering these

pre-Code films "is more heartening than just uncovering a trove of amazing movies. It's like finding out you had a host of long-lost aunts and grandmothers, free and fascinating ladies about whom, for reasons of their own, your parents never told you."

In recent years, these long-forgotten pre-Code films have been turning up on cable and in festivals, giving us a glimpse of a lost world. Many of them hold up quite well, and it can be an education to watch old films do new tricks—though the era also featured a lot of formula weepies in which actresses embody clichés. In any event, the films LaSalle admires were on their way out—and screwball comedy was on its way in—even before Breen took over. Two new comedies that pointed the way, *The Thin Man* and *It Happened One Night*, were released in the first half of 1934.

It's not as if Hollywood stopped making good movies after 1934. The Code may have been a heavy burden, but many moviemakers were ingenious enough to adapt.

Ann Harding would fade in the Code's shadow, but a lot of the female stars of the early 1930s—Claudette Colbert, Myrna Loy, Barbara Stanwyck—flourished. Enter Maria DiBattista's *Fast-Talking Dames*. Since there couldn't be much sex on the screen, or even much talk about it, frenetic screwball comedy filled the gap. DiBattista, a professor of English and comparative literature at Princeton, writes with great understanding of and appreciation for the women of these films, despite her sometimes arid academic language and her unnecessary forays into Freudian interpretation. Screwball's been well mined by such writers as James Harvey, Elizabeth Kendall, and Jeanine Basinger. Still, DiBattista extracts new and provocative material from it.

According to DiBattista, the "fast-talking dame" of the 1930s and 1940s is "singularly American" and "one of the most impressive and influential creations of the talkies." The general type may go back at least to Shakespeare's Beatrice and Congreve's Millamant, but there's something distinctly American about this character's brashness, her head-on readiness to deal with life. Nor were these dames pushovers—they were often, as DiBattista calls them, female Pygmalions, molding their men even as they fall in love with them. Jean Arthur would do it to Gary Cooper in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and again to Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). What does the dame teach her soft-spoken man? What else but how to do a little fast-talking himself. Even when they're on the ditzy side, these women still know what to do. In *My Man Godfrey* (1936), ditz Carole Lombard pulls William Powell out of the city dump and teaches him self-respect.

DiBattista devotes whole chapters to the greatest dames in fast-talking history, from classy Irene Dunne talking her way out of and back into marriage with Cary Grant in *The Awful Truth* (1937) to breathless Katharine Hepburn weaving garlands of words around a befuddled Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) to con-woman Barbara Stanwyck convincing a dumbfounded Henry Fonda to fall in love with her in two separate incarnations in *The Lady Eve* (1941). The fastest-talking dame of all was "newspaperman" Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday* (1940), who dueled with her editor (and screwball's indispensable man) Cary Grant while beating the boys to the scoop. Quite a sisterhood. (DiBattista errs when she invites slow-talking Greta Garbo into the sorority on the basis of her 1939 comedy *Ninotchka*.)

DiBattista justifiably bemoans what happened in comedies by the mid-1940s. The "quick and good women who seemingly had and could do everything" were suddenly an "endangered species." Claudette Colbert, one of the founding dames of screwball in *It Happened One Night*, was now submitting to men like the laconic John Wayne in *Without Reservations* (1946).

> Noir offers a dark world where even the innocent can be destroyed. There, danger lurks and happiness recedes into the ubiquitous shadows.

Smart women started disappearing. A romantic comedy might now star a "dumb blonde" like Judy Holliday or Marilyn Monroe. In the 1930s, even the "dumb" blondes such as Jean Harlow or Carole Lombard were wised up enough to know the score. But Marilyn Monroe in her greatest comedy, *Some Like It Hot* (1959), is the character who's not in on the joke. Reversing what Stanwyck did to Fonda, Tony Curtis fools Monroe in two separate disguises. Comedy queen Doris Day spent a lot of screen time acting outraged at the advances she imagined men were making toward her—something pretty rare before the war, when women either were the ones making the advances or

knew how to get rid of a man with a snappy line.

A new type of film became possible, perhaps even necessary: film noir. Noir was the perfect response to the censors—the Code demanded that people be punished for their sins, and in film noir *everyone* pays. Noir offers a dark world where even the innocent can be destroyed. There, danger lurks and happiness recedes into the ubiquitous shadows. And there's always a woman, the femme fatale who will drag a man down before he realizes that it's too late. In *Out of the Past* (1947), somebody tells Robert Mitchum that nobody's all bad. Thinking of the movie's siren, Jane Greer, he answers, "She comes the closest." That's noir.

Eddie Muller, in his charming and well-researched book *Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir,* paints portraits of six such women: Jane Greer, Audrey Totter, Marie Windsor, Evelyn Keyes, Coleen Gray, and Ann Savage. These actresses might not be as famous as Katharine Hepburn or Ginger Rogers, but they did play some of the screen's most memorably bad women. Perhaps the reason they aren't so well-remembered is that film noir is mostly told from the point of view of its male characters—we rarely get to know what makes its women tick. Furthermore, the film noir woman is in many ways a throwback to the vamps of the 1920s. But vampishness was a notably visual attribute, and worked much better in silents than it did later in talkies. While such characters might have been fun to play, they were often one-dimensional.

Muller is a journalist as well as a movie historian. His book is not an analysis of the films but a look behind noir. (The story of Marie Windsor crouching as she approaches John Garfield is Muller's.) He has a chapter on each actress, discussing how she came to Los Angeles and established her career, all while keeping the Hollywood wolves at bay, or sometimes inviting the wolves in. Each gets a second chapter about what they've done more recently, after noir died out in the late '50s. All the portraits are sympathetic and fascinating.

Dark City Dames is a follow-up to an earlier Muller book, the well-regarded *Dark City: The Lost World Of Film Noir.* The new work lets the women get their chance, since the men, like Bogart and Mitchum, are so often the focus. Muller is less analytical than many critics, more into the fun of film (and, hence, often more enjoyable to read). To him, noir represents the darker side of America, a dimension that postwar Hollywood couldn't obscure. Still, as dangerous as it is, it's also an exciting—even enticing—world. The femme fatale he writes about is a central part of that enticement.

The late '50s and '60s brought an opening up of permissible onscreen subject matter. One effect was to help slay film noir. The sex and violence that previously had to be implied could now be met head-on. Politics —not just regarding the government, but in everyday life—could now be openly discussed. Misdirection in these areas was no longer necessary, and would seem quaint. As glorious as its plotting and dialogue could be, noir started to seem too artificial. In the 1950s, the Code was seen increasingly as old-fashioned. (In 1968, it was superseded by the ratings system that, with minor changes, still exists.) With more ways to explore the human

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character, film noir wasn't needed any longer. Noir thrived on shadows, the threat of what's hiding out there; the newer type of personal filmmaking that followed believed in shining lights into those dark corners.

This was the ultimate revenge on Joseph Breen. He and his successors had kept the lid on the "new woman" for 34 years. Now she was back with a vengeance. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw scores of Hollywood films that explored relationships with more openness than ever before. Not everyone was thrilled; many wanted to return to the films of the 1950s, films that reflected Breen's desire to return to the 1890s. But there was no turning back.

Or was there? Screwball still lives. *Arthur* (1981) was an attempt at it, though the old genre choice of love or money was thrown out the window when Arthur gets both. *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) and *Runaway Bride* (1999), a pair of Julia Roberts movies, are both attempted throwbacks to screwball, but the former subverts the form by having Julia fail to get her man, while the latter plays on the stereotype of the woman who can't make up her mind at the altar. A third Roberts film, *Notting Hill* (1999), suggests that the Code may still have its fans, too: Roberts plays a star who has to humble herself to get her man, even if she no longer has to renounce her career.

Fast-talking dames are still talking; their last stand is TV. Like old movies, TV programs are shot quickly and are full of dialogue. They actually synthesize both pre-and post-Code women of the 1930s. The women of *Friends* and *Sex and the City* all have jobs, but their main concern is still men. However, there's one obvious way in which the "new" woman has emerged: These women have sex, and they're not ashamed of it. Conflicted, yes, but not ashamed. Comedy's old bad girl who must be punished for her dalliances, the centerpiece of the Code, no longer exists.

Noir will never entirely die, but it will never be the same either. *Body Heat* (1981), for example, is a reworking of *Double Indemnity* (1944). But while in the original, femme fatale Barbara Stanwyck was punished along with her sap, Fred MacMurray, the updated version makes Kathleen Turner a mastermind who literally gets away with murder.

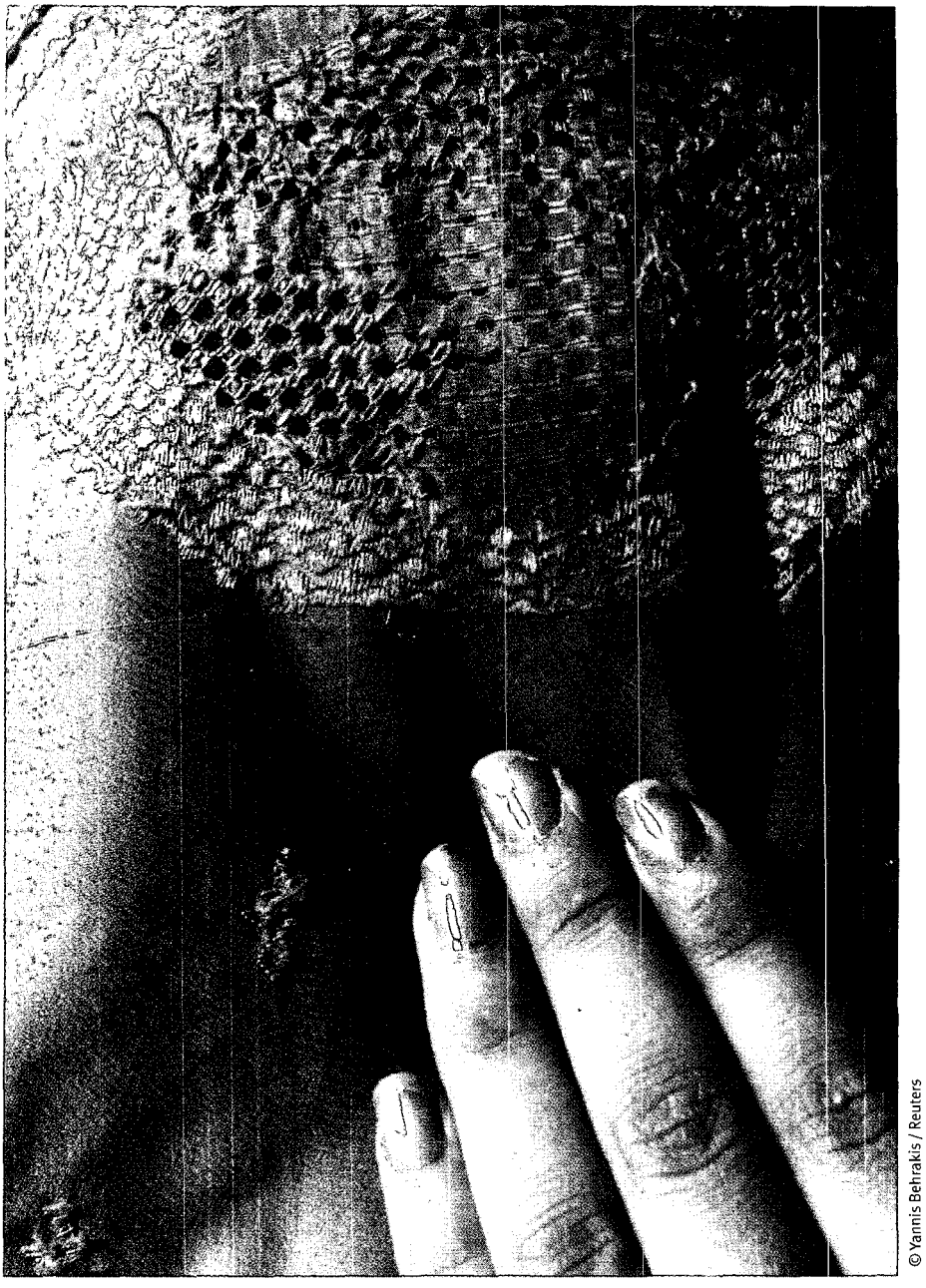
Today, most major roles for women are hybrid parts with old, beloved concepts (a "knight in shining armor") mixed with new ideas ("women can do anything a man can do"). In *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), Jimmy Stewart is head clerk over saleswoman Margaret Sullavan, and she can't wait to be swept away and cared for. In the updated remake, *You've Got Mail* (1998), Meg Ryan owns a whole store (even if love interest Tom Hanks owns more). Losing her store is traumatic, not merely a stepping stone on the way to romance. (Perhaps Meg Ryan gave the performance that announced the new era better than any other: the deli scene in 1989's *When Harry Met Sally.*)

Apparently the trick today is to make a film's story seem new enough so the audience doesn't feel insulted, but with enough of the old-fashioned formula so that it still fulfills deep-seated audience desires. In *Miss Congeniality* (2000), Sandra Bullock got to play both an FBI agent *and* a beauty pageant contestant. Even Princess Fiona in the massively popular *Shrek* (2001), a woman who literally waits in a castle to be rescued by a knight, gets her chance to kick some butt. *Thelma and Louise* (1991) don't get away in the end, but they can can lead the police on a cross-country chase and have the film firmly on their side. A woman's place in the movies is now much like her place in society: ambiguous. ▯

Steve Kurtz (skz@mediaone.net) is a writer in Los Angeles.

Free Hand

Virginia Postrel



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A week after the Taliban lost control of Kabul, Reuters photographer Yannis Behrakis took this picture of an Afghan widow begging. Anonymous behind her burqa, she flashes a once-forbidden sign of personality: chipped red polish on her carefully maintained nails. She applied the polish the day after the liberation of Kabul. The chips came from work and the passage of time.

The Taliban outlawed wearing polish in the late 1990s, punishing some offenders by amputating a fingertip. Importing polish was banned only in July 2001, which suggests that women were still wearing painted nails within the safety of their homes. But a woman who had to beg on the street could not have afforded the risk of violating the ban in public.

The impulse for personal adornment is hard to stamp out. "Making special," art theorist Ellen Dissanyake's term to describe what all art and ritual have in common, is a deep human drive—all the more so when the object is one's own body. By reshaping or decorating our outer selves, we express our inner sense of self: *I like that* becomes *I'm like that*. The right to wear nail polish, seemingly the most trivial of matters, is in fact a vital freedom, part of the very freedom to create oneself.

Education Policy and Information

E. D. Hirsch Jr. is a professor of education and humanities emeritus, University of Virginia; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

Economists say that the unequal distribution of information compromises market efficiency. Advocates of free-market school reforms such as charter schools and voucher programs should heed this important truth, as should school boards and state legislators. Without a free flow of reliable information, parents and policymakers cannot make intelligent decisions. Unfortunately, **reliable information is a scarce resource in the education world.**

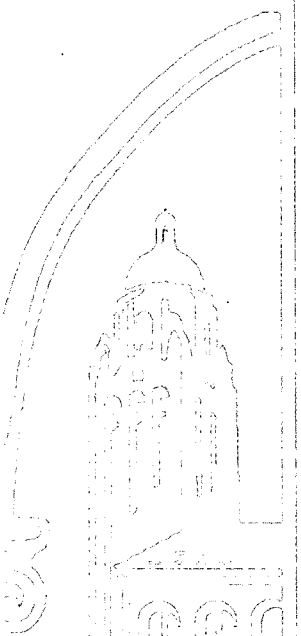
Educational data exist in oversupply, but there's a critical difference between data and information. Data do not speak for themselves; they must be interpreted by teasing out the separate factors that affect educational outcomes and assigning relative causality to them. Useful analyses, dependable generalizations, and accurate interpretations of educational data are in short supply.

To those who must make decisions, it is disconcerting that so much educational data have produced so little usable information. The November 7 issue of *Education Week* reports that data on the multimillion-dollar "whole school" reform effort are inconclusive. Similarly, the November issue of *Scientific American* reports that data on the effects of class-size reduction are also inconclusive. We cannot draw dependable policy implications from these studies because the data remain ungeneralized and, in a fundamental sense, uninterpreted.

The best recent attempt to generalize educational data was offered by the late Jeanne Chall in her slender last book, *The Academic Achievement Challenge*—the fruit of a lifetime of engagement with educational research. Yet Chall's book has had a negligible effect on charter schools or state policies because its information has not been disseminated. Some thoughtful philanthropist should send thousands of copies of Chall's book to those in a position to affect policy.

One of the greatest gains in our understanding of scientific method came with the insight that data take on new meanings with new interpretations and that the best interpretations take into account relevant knowledge from the widest possible range of domains. **We need to transform the ocean of educational data into usable information on the basis of the most wide-ranging and exacting analyses.** In a field beset with ideology and politics, it is not surprising that good science is in short supply. But regardless of one's faith in markets or, alternatively, in state regulation, we still need reliable information, which means that we need really good science, not the impostor that now calls itself "research" in the field of education. Without better information we are unlikely to achieve much improvement in the quality and equity of our schools.

— E. D. Hirsch Jr.



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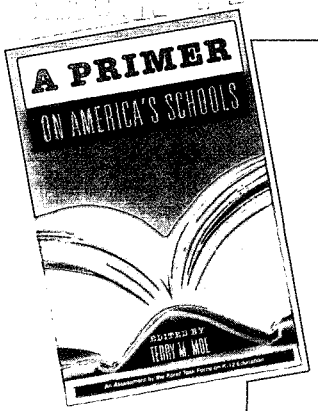

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